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Feature Story

A SECRET SERVICE MYSTERY

by

Hamilton Craigie & Elliot Balestier

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A SECRET SERVICE MYSTERY

by Hamilton Craigie & Elliot Balestier

CHAPTER ONE

MR. CASPER EVERETT helped himself to a cigar from the silver humidor on the table by his side, lighted it deliberately, and drawing the folds of his flowered silk dressing-gown around him, leaned back luxuriously in the deep leather-covered chair, regarding his rather ill-favored visitor with narrowed eyes.

"From the tenor of your remarks," he observed genially, "I judge you are trying to blackmail me. Possibly you are not aware that blackmail is a felony punishable by imprisonment."

"Aw, can th' fancy language an' come across with th' jack!" growled his vis-à-vis, a blocky, red-haired individual with a seamed, lead-colored countenance. "I got th' deadwood on yer, an' don't yer forget it. I seen you an' your side-kick blow that peter last night; I seen him make his getaway with th' stuff in a motor-boat, an' I followed you home. I'm wise, jerry, hep to th' whole lay, get me? So you kick in with my cut, or it's yours truly to th' bulls."

Mr. Everett smiled—a cold, wintry gleam, like the sun on ice.

"So all you want is—ah—your share?" he inquired amicably. "Evidently you've not seen the morning papers."

He picked up one of a half-dozen from the table.

"Ah—here it is!" he continued, glancing at the staring headlines in a double-column spread on the first page:

"DARING BURGLARY

"Thieves visit the home of Senator Hoffman on Massachusetts avenue, rifle safe and sideboard, securing several thousand dollars' worth of jewelry, silver, and cash, as well as valuable papers. Thief attempting to cross Potomac in motor-boat captured by river police; flings self overboard and escapes, but all the booty is recovered."

"So you see, my friend, there is nothing to share."

With an oath the man snatched the paper from Everett's hand and hastily re-read the headlines. He vented a disgusted snort.

"Solid ivory!" was his contemptuous comment. "Why didn't he put the stuff overboard instead of goin' himself? But that don't make no difference to me," he went on aggressively. "If it hadn't been for you two buttin' in I'd a-copped it all. You got to open up just th' same, see? You're good for five grand—five thousand—an' that's lettin' you down easy. Are you goin' t' come through?"

The man in the armchair considered a moment, lean, strong fingers caressing the point of his forward-thrusting chin.

"Five thousand is a lot of money," he observed at last.

"Tell it to Sweeney!" exclaimed his visitor, glancing around the richly furnished library. "There's more than that right here. You're in luck I don't make it ten, I'll say so!"

Mr. Casper Everett sighed resignedly.

"I'll have to send to the bank for it," he said—"the Day-and-Night bank, that is—it's rather late." There was a queer shake in his voice; his eyes narrowed, glowing on a sudden gray-green like a cat's. "I—I suppose you want cash?" he ended, his voice breaking oddly in the middle register.

"Right th' first time, young fella!" assented the intruder, with a fleering grimace. "An' small bills, too; nothing over twenty, get me?" He grunted. "Hell!" he added presently; "this game has me wingin'— it's too soft. If it wasn't my lay youse butted in on I'd pass it up. I would, for a fact."

The man in the armchair shot a curious glance at his peculiar visitor; then he arose, and going to a desk produced a check-book, wrote out a check, enclosed it in an envelope, which he addressed, and touched a bell at his elbow.

There came a sudden, brief explosion of movement from across the desk. Everett could not have said how it was done, but of a sudden, as if materialized out of the air, the man's hand had thrust forward across the intervening space, in it a heavy automatic. It was as if the visitor had reached forward, by some uncanny legerdemain, to pluck, out of some fourth dimension ready to hand, the gun, which now, steady as a rock, bore full upon the man at the desk. The voice came in a snarling whisper:

"No funny business, mister — you watch your step, that's all!"

CHAPTER TWO

EVERETT raised a protesting hand even as the pistol slid back out of sight and the door opened, disclosing a tall, square-shouldered individual with the bearing of a soldier rather than that of a servant.

"Take this to the bank, Bemis"—Everett's voice rang, curt, authoritative — "and bring back the cash. Get it in twenties, tens and fives. And hurry back."

The man called Bemis straightened, raised his right hand; then dropped it smartly at his side, inclined his head silently, his expression wooden in its vacuity. Accepting the envelope from his master, he turned and as silently departed. To all appearances his gaze had not left Everett's face during the brief instructions, but nevertheless he had missed none of the lightning motions of the latter's right hand resting carelessly on the arm of his chair below the line of the desk and out of range of the red-haired man's keenly suspicious eyes.

The blackmailer grinned widely as the heavy door swung shut behind the servant.

"I'll tell the world," he remarked easily, "you've got him well-trained."

Everett raised his eyebrows the fraction of an inch, in his eyes again that brief, mordant flicker, like a sharp sword.

"Oh, I'm jerry," laughed the crook, unseeing. "What's th' use! That's th' poor fish that went overboard. I——" He paused with a quick frown.

"Lookee here, mister," he continued suspiciously, "he don't shape up like that kind of a yella hound. What's th' game, hey? Come clean."

But his suave host smiled mirthlessly by way of answer, in his eyes, however, a faint pin-point—it may have been a satiric gleam.

"Umm," he remarked thoughtfully after a moment. Then, with a sudden turn, stifling an incipient yawn with one well-manicured hand, he continued as if he had not heard, as if talking to himself:

"Well, I must say you don't *look* like an amateur, mister—ah—Mister——"

He got no further. As many of his class, the intruder may have had his share of temperament — the vanity of the peterman, the yegg, the craving for recognition which is not entirely a prerogative of various more respectable avocations.

The red-haired man snorted. "Amachure! Huh, I guess you ain't never heard——" He

checked himself abruptly, with a self-conscious grin, then resumed: "Well, there's Ernie Foran—you know *him*. Well, he's a pikin' title-taper, or he *was*, before they nicked him for a finnif—but that ain't nothin' — he'd a-been afraid t' carry a can of soup from here to th' corner—an' they calls him 'International Ernie'. Me? There ain't a boxman from here t' Frisco don't know my work, me trade-mark. There was the Thirteenth National, now — the Warranty Trust, but I ain't sayin' I had a hand in *that*——"

He paused. This swell mobsman—for so he conceived Everett to be—well, he was pretty smooth. It wouldn't do—no, it wouldn't! Here he had been gassing for the best part of a quarter of an hour. He grinned cavernously, then shut his large mouth in a straight line as the door opened, disclosing Bemis, a long, thick parcel in his hand.

Following the servant's departure Everett without more ado handed the package to the red-haired man, who, with a swift glance at the giver, ripped it open. For a moment he stared as if half-believing the evidence of his eyes; then, with swift fingers, ran rapidly through the big bundle of bills.

"Th' goods!" he exclaimed with a grunt of satisfaction. "You've got sense, young fella——" He paused with a grim smile. Well, it had been easy; like taking candy from a baby. It had—— He stopped suddenly, his eyes narrowing to slits, his face a mask, a tense alertness gleaming in the restless eyes. A blocky, hard-faced giant with a bristling, aggressive mustache, his right hand suggestively in his overcoat pocket, had entered silently, followed closely by Bemis.

CHAPTER THREE

"EVENIN', Red Anglim!" greeted the big man grimly to Everett's tough guest.

Anglim gulped, in his gaze a look of dawning respect for the imperturbable Everett.

"Hello, chief!" he answered with an affectation of ease. "You ain't lookin' f'r *me*, are you? You've got nothin' on me—that last trick cleared up everything. You know I'm reformed—there ain't nothin' against me. An' that's a moral."

"Only a little matter of blackmail, Anglim," replied the chief of police shortly, "and—just put those bills on the desk there."

Anglim moved reluctantly to obey.

"If you have me pinched for this," he growled to Everett, "I'll blow th' works. I'll——"

"Quiet—you!" commanded the chief sharply. "Keep your eye on him, Bemis."

He followed Everett to the window, where for several moments they stood together in whispered conference.

Anglim, watching, observed the chief's deferential manner with a shrewd, inward commentary as to its meaning.

"I'm wise—an' then again I ain't," he began as the two returned to the center of the room. "It looks like I been tryin' t' bite a iron dog—an' perhaps Mister Casper Everett ain't th' society johnnie I thought he was; perhaps he's somethin' different, see! An' perhaps if I'm pinched I might talk some——"

"That'll be about all from you, Anglim," pronounced the chief quietly. "Now, you listen to me. For reasons of his own, Mr. Everett here is not going to prosecute, now. He has use for you—you are under his orders. Do you get me?"

"Oh, yes! I make you, chief!" sneered Anglim, gaining courage at the apparent concession. His pig eyes for a moment flamed with a wary light, lips drawn backward from the teeth in a soundless snarl.

"I don't think you do," replied the chief sternly. "You are to place yourself under Mr. Everett's orders. But you are to keep your mouth shut, absolutely! If you so much as whisper what you think or know, or guess—if you even mention his name—you'll get yours!"

"An' what would I be sayin', then?" growled the peterman, confidently. "What would I be tellin' th' judge, an' the newspaper boys? Ha? You couldn't shut me up then!"

The chief strode over, thrusting his face with its salient jaw and stubby mustache within an inch of Anglim's. The man cowered before the hard, cold eyes, the expression on the implacable, grim mouth.

"You've boasted you'd never be taken alive,

Anglim." The chief's tone lowered a note in a grim significance. "I'm afraid you'd resist arrest. You obey orders, or your case won't get to a judge."

Anglim gave back glance for glance in a sullen bravado. He understood the threat only too well. He laughed harshly, his hardihood apparently in nowise abated,, but in his eyes a look between acquiescence and a dull wonder.

"That goes as she lays," he replied at last. "Just as you say, chief. You're the doctor."

The policeman for a moment stood silently regarding him, eye to eye; then, with a nod to Everett and a significant glance, turned on his heel. As the door closed on his broad back Everett turned on Anglim and for a long minute held him in a brooding, speculative appraisal.

"Anglim," he said at length, "your classic remark about 'biting an iron dog' is perhaps truer than you realize; furthermore, said canine is connected with a live wire and if you play the game from now on I'll not press the button; otherwise I'm afraid you're due for a jolt." He paused, then spoke crisply, with decision:

"I'm going to give you a chance not only to save yourself, but to win"—he motioned carelessly to the pile of paper money on the desk—"that five thousand dollars."

In the peterman's eyes there glowed and died a brief, kindling spark.

"I've done time," he acknowledged frankly, "an' I ain't got recommends that would get me a job inside a bank, but I ain't never been a stool, or snitched on a pal, an' when I'm bought I stays that way. See! I'm hep. Now what——"

"You will receive your instructions later," replied Everett shortly. "The job is in the line of your profession. At present——"

The entrance of the silent Bemis interrupted him. He looked up with a quick frown.

"Twenty-six," announced the man cryptically.

Everett's face cleared, his eyes appearing as if lighted from within.

"Good!" he answered, smiling gently. "I will receive it here. Take Anglim with you, Bemis, and do not disturb me until I ring."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE door had scarcely closed upon Bemis and the peterman when there came a movement at the far end of the great room—a tapestry shivered along its length; a board creaked; then, out of the thick-piled shadows there stepped a girl. Slim and straight, like an arrowed flame, Ruth Neville was, with that milky pallor seen so often with red-bronze hair, the slimness accentuated by her modish riding-habit, at the belt of which a great jack rose vied with the carmine of her lips.

With her gaze upon the man at the table a sudden rosy flush stained the clear pallor of her cheeks, then as abruptly faded, her lips tightening upon an incipient smile.

"Well—well?" she asked quickly.

Everett observed her with a brooding concentration. The girl might have been a lovely manikin, a figurante, and nothing more.

"You were mistaken, twenty-six," he said coldly. "You should know that in our business there is neither room nor excuse for mistakes. Last night's affair was hazardous and desperate; success was its only justification—failure the unpardonable sin. And—we did not succeed."

The girl favored him with a swift, searching gaze, tinged with a certain hurt, an expression of withdrawal.

"Yesterday Senator Hoffman's nephew, Walter, came from New York," she told him, speaking rapidly in a staccato monotone. "He brought a package the size and shape you described, and asked his uncle to put it in the safe for him, saying that it contained private papers. I saw it put in the safe."

"Undoubtedly," rejoined Everett dryly. "Only they were private letters — they had nothing to do with our matter—and, anyway, I was not concerned with Mr. Walter Hoffman. In fact, I had forgotten that the senator had a nephew."

For a moment a little silence fell; the girl, her booted foot tap-tapping on the rug, her gaze fixed on a point on the wall over his shoulder.

"You are scarcely fair to me, Mr. Everett," Ruth exclaimed at last, with sudden energy. "How do you expect me to co-operate intelli-

gently? I must work virtually in the dark. If I am at all worthy of your confidence you should trust me fully."

Everett lifted his head then, his eyes upon the girl as if he beheld her all at once for the first time. The frown gradually faded from his forehead, to be replaced by an expression almost of approval.

"I believe you are right, Miss Neville," he said smiling. "If so, the blame for last night's fiasco must be mine. By a fortunate chance no harm has been done; we have only to begin over again on a sounder basis."

The girl's expression may have meant anything or nothing for him who could have read it. And even Everett, astute as he may have been, had his limitations. He saw merely a face flushed, lovely; perhaps, with the lobe of his brain that functioned with irrelevant matters, he may have speculated idly that she was a deuced pretty girl, a beauty, even, when one considered the matter. But nothing of this was reflected in his tone as he continued:

"Briefly, these are the facts: For some time the State Department has been considering certain secret proposals of a great power, in regard to the ultimate disposition of certain outlying islands in the—er—Pacific archipelago. Naturally, advance knowledge of the results of this consideration would be eagerly welcomed by several of the other great powers, and as a matter of undeniable truth one of them has been getting it regularly. Of course, the bare facts that a proposal has been made might as readily come from the other side as from us, but the details of our consideration of it could only proceed from a leak in our own department."

He paused with a certain empressement:

"Now, as you are aware, Senator Hoffman, while not a cabinet officer, is high in the confidence of both the President and the Secretary of State. His advice would, and naturally has been sought, not only on that account, but because of his special knowledge, he having been a resident of the territory in question both before and after the Spanish war."

Of a sudden he bent a keen look upon the girl, almost in the nature of a challenge; then he went on, cold, precise:

"Of course, the senator is above suspicion; but his nephew, Walter, is his personal secretary. As I said, I had forgotten that there was a nephew of the same name," he ended with a twisted smile.

Ruth Neville suddenly rose and walked to the window, gazing outward into the black well of the night, her face averted from the man at the desk, her slim fingers closing and unclosing, in her eyes an expression akin to panic and—a something more. Everett was conscious of a sudden qualm, a vague unease. In the sudden silence of the long room he could hear the ticking of his watch, like the beating of a heart. Time—time—that was what they needed, and they had so little of it! After all, what did he know of this girl, this woman with the slumbrous eyes and the baffling manner—what did any of them know? For, after all, credentials—what were they but scraps of paper?

There had been the case of Carthew, he remembered, a traitor in a high place; of Arbuthnot, recreant in spite of all. There had been others.

She turned, and her clear glance for a long moment sounded the depths of his. There was candor in the look—abruptly, illogically, he felt it even while hydra-headed doubt beset him with new fears.

"You startled me." He heard her voice, cool, impersonally controlled. "I wish you had told me this before about — Walter. Since I became Nanette Hoffman's companion a month ago I have learned many things. Frankly, I believe you are on the wrong track. I do not believe that Walter Hoffman, the senator's nephew, would be capable of such a thing, even had he a motive, which I must say is not apparent."

Everett, the while he nodded acquiescence, was conscious of a curious amazement at her defense.

"I know Walter, the senator's nephew that is, personally," he said. "I should be distressed to believe it. But every other possibility has been exhausted. As to a motive, although his uncle is tremendously rich, he has ideas of his own, and Walter has only his salary as secretary to depend on. I happen to know that he has been speculating, and is rather deeply in debt; recently he has been paying up."

"Nevertheless I am certain that you are wrong," insisted the girl.

Ruth paused, turning to the man with an abrupt, birdlike movement, almost a foreign gesturing of the white, flashing fingers.

Everett drew in his breath with a hissing inspiration. "You — you know something!" he exclaimed sharply. "You have a theory based on something you have not told me!"

"No," replied the girl. And somehow the single monosyllable carried conviction. "I have an idea, that is all; at present it is based on nothing tangible. It is so vague that I should not feel justified in voicing it. By the way," she added, with one of those abrupt turns which he had observed were characteristic, "what did you expect to find in that package which Senator Hoffman's nephew brought to the house yesterday?"

It was a frontal attack, but Everett's hesitation was scarcely perceptible.

"Oh—something like that," he answered easily, pointing to the package of money on the desk. "An agent of mine is a servant in the house of the man known to be the emissary of the government that has been getting the information. Two days ago he sent my man with his secretary to the bank to get ten thousand dollars, in bills of small denomination. These were put up in a paper parcel such as I have described and deposited in this man's safe. The final decision in the matter referred to was about to be reached. I judged they were intended as payment for information." He eyed her keenly.

Miss Neville nodded, in her gaze no trace of guile.

"Of course," she commented. "Does Walter — does the senator's nephew know this man?"

"Yes," replied Everett slowly. "But that proves nothing; the man goes everywhere and is socially impeccable. He poses as an Englishman of means, but he is not English at all. You know who he is?"

He smiled, but the smile faded as he saw the abrupt look of almost horror in the gray eyes raised to his. It was gone in an instant, but he had seen. But in a moment she had herself in hand.

"Not — Harold Chelmsford?" she asked quietly.

"Precisely. 'Harold Chelmsford' as he calls himself," answered Everett with a dry intonation. "Do you know him?"

"I have seen him several times," she answered with what he thought the merest shading of a hesitancy. "I—I have never been presented to him."

Ruth rose quickly. "Mr. Everett," she said, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, "I want you to trust me in this matter. I—I believe I know where the leak is, but I want to be certain. I promise you that nothing shall stand in the way of my duty—nothing! That and my country are first!"

Everett, who had also risen, inclined his head.

"I have implicit confidence in your good faith," he told her, gravely. "But I want you to understand the importance of this matter. Finding the leak is, after all, a secondary consideration to stopping it before it is too late. The final decision has not as yet been reached; that is why your information that Walter Hoffman, the senator's nephew, had received the package surprised me, for it is not the custom to pay for such things in advance. The decision, however, may be arrived at at any moment now. Chelmsford is under the closest surveillance, but he is infernally clever; I'll say that for him."

He favored her with a long, searching scrutiny.

"I trust you absolutely, and without reservation. Remember that," he ended.

He extended his hand and the girl took it with a firm, cool grasp.

"Thank you," she replied simply, turning with the word, but when she had gone Everett sat a long time staring at the door that had closed behind her before he finally touched the bell that summoned Bemis and Anglim.

CHAPTER FIVE

A TALL man in top-hat and evening clothes hidden under an enveloping Inverness issued from a narrow door of a building on C street, S. W. It was a rainy night, and the arc-lights made brief splashes of

windy radiance in the driving smother, but the tall man was not thinking of the weather.

Like a black shadow he rounded the corner of the house, and like a shadow, drifting under the pale gleam of the windy night, he turned abruptly at the corner of the street, gazing up-wind like a pointer at the long stretch of gleaming asphalt, deserted now save for a few belated pedestrians beating for home against the gale.

Down the street at his back as he went forward there sounded the rolling rattle of a night-stick, the staccato thunder of a motor. The man in the tall hat and Inverness shrank against a high wall at his right, his hand going to his pocket. For a split second there in the dark he stood as though carved in ebony, listening, holding his breath; then, as if wrung from his lips, deep down there sounded the mutter as in an alien tongue:

"Ah—this weather!"

The throaty guttural of that "Ah!" might well have been the thick syllable of a speech un-English, but the man himself, even in the wind and the dark and the infrequent, chill gleaming of the sputtering arc-lights, bore upon his person the unmistakable imprint of the Islander, the well-bred Briton, even to the Inverness and top-hat.

Now satisfied, apparently, that he had the street to himself, he strode onward with an easy, swinging step, yet a stiff-kneed stride, as of one who had learned that swinging stride on foreign fields under a drill-master who had not conned his manual from, say, the Sandhurst model.

At intervals, now that he walked alone in this whispering black well of silence and the night, the tall man would chuckle, deep in his throat, patting his chest as if to reassure himself of something beneath, a something that crackled crisply at his touch.

Presently there would be lights, warmth, entertainment for the inner man. But while he walked thus alone the sole pedestrian in this lonely street it behooved him to be careful. And yet the man had earned his spurs where common men had failed, died doubtless without the chance that to him was all-sufficient. The highways and byways of Europe, the capitals of France and England, the gloomy purlieus of a dozen cities were to him as familiar as main-traveled roads.

Abruptly, when he had come perhaps a matter of three blocks, he shifted his stick from his left hand to his right. Across the street, where the light lay like a pool of shimmering silver in a river of ink, there had bulked suddenly a greater shadow, drifting like a wind-blown leaf out of the dimness: a creature of the night——

The man in the top-hat appeared not to notice, his stride even unhurried. That drifting shadow just across was nearer now—it had crossed behind him. But the man in the top-hat did not turn his head.

Foot-pads he did not fear; he knew how to deal with them. But there were apaches of the night who sought loot other than one's purse, and the night prowler, if he were such, might well be one of these.

A broad belt of shadow, ink-black, stretched just before the tall man, at its farther end the red-and-green lights of an all-night dispensary. He entered that deep well of darkness; there came a sudden, plunging rush, the snick of steel—a choked gurgle, a groaning curse, a low snarl, the vicious grunt of a swinging blow. Then——

Serene, unruffled, the tall man emerged into the light, on his stiff lips a tight little grin, merciless, suave as the wide yawning of a tiger.

"Swine!"

The word seemed to be breathed outward, the lips unmoving. While just behind——

Limp, in a grotesque huddle of sprawling limbs, a still figure lay hunched, crumpled like an empty bag upon the stones. A thin ray of light like a pointing finger ran downward, leaving the face in shadow, but where the man's coat was flung open to the night a something glimmered faintly from the lapel: a small gold button, bearing a curious device.

The tall man, unheeding, had reached the corner of the street. An owl taxi, careering out of the wind-swept avenue, turned inward toward the curb. The tall man made an imperceptible movement of his finger—the cab slowed; then, its engine still running, was away with the man as its passenger.

A brief ride of perhaps a quarter of an hour, then a grinding of brakes, a whispered

word, the driver with his hand to his cap in an almost military salute.

The man in the Inverness, stick crooked on his left arm, walked briskly past a row of darkened house-fronts, halted, struck his stick idly against the pavement, waited.

A thin red pencil of light grew and broadened to a flaming arc; a door gave inward silently; the man passed inward like a shadow.

At the end of a long corridor a light burned; there issued the murmur of voices, thick, throaty, with an undertone of tension, repressed but evident. The tall man entered.

"Ah—good-evening, Herren!" he said.

One of the men addressed, a blocky individual with a close-cropped, bristling pompadour, leaned forward in his chair.

"Always the damned English!" he grated. Then: "Well, you have it, is it not so?"

"But, yes, highness," answered the tall man. "There remains now merely the other matter of which we spoke; the same agency has promised me a very complete copy, which, with this"—he tapped his breast—"will 'fill our hand.'" He laughed, yet with a respectful note.

"And now, highness," he continued, "there remains only my evening at the senator's — after that——"

"Good!" interrupted the blocky man. "Now——" He turned to some papers on the table before him.

The tall man, bowing with an easy grace, wheeled to depart. Then he turned back.

"Ah," said he, "I had almost forgotten. On my way there was a—jackal. I left him for the—ah—crows." He shrugged. "I do not think he knew me, but I was taking no chances and so——"

The blocky man swung round in his chair with a trace of irritation.

"Well—but no more of it, I tell you! These cursed police, they are stupid, but they persist. You must be careful."

He waved his hand in dismissal. The tall man stood a moment under the lights before departing to a region in the rear from which sounded the clink of glass, a murmur of talk. Tall and well set up, he might have been handsome save for a rather cruel, tight-lipped mouth and a roving eye that gave him a distinctly furtive air, scarcely in keeping with his rather bulky build. Now he stood a moment as though lost in thought, a smile crinkling the corners of his mouth. Then he went outward to the clinking glasses.

CHAPTER SIX

IT was a representative gathering of the cosmopolitan society of Washington that filled to overflowing the great ballroom of Senator Hoffman's somewhat overdecorated establishment that evening. Foreign diplomats in elaborate uniforms, scintillant with orders, with officers of the army and navy mingled with the more soberly attired senators and representatives; while everywhere gleamed white shoulders and the brilliant jewels of women.

Not the least brilliant of these was the senator's wife, a tall, fair woman of possibly thirty-eight; a veritable Brunnhilde blonde, but of a restless habit, her cold eyes searching, searching and never finding that which they sought. Senator Hoffman's wife was indeed little older than his nephew; she had been and was a famous beauty, and many were the swift glances in her wake as she circulated with an imperious dignity among her guests: glances of admiration and of envy from the women, and often a something warmer from the men.

At a group of three in a far corner of the billiard room she paused with a wintry smile.

"This is pastoral," she remarked to Walter and Nanette in a clear, full-toned voice. "A pleasant little tête-à-tête."

The presence of Ruth Neville, the third member of the group, she ignored altogether.

Walter Hoffman looked up, a slight frown of annoyance on his strong, clean-cut face, while Nanette, a slim, pretty girl of eighteen, turned toward her a cheek stained just now with a faint tinge of color.

"You can scarcely call it a tête-à-tête," Nanette replied, with a hint of acid in her tone. "There are three of us."

"Ah, yes—Miss Neville," returned Mrs. Hoffman, her eyes resting for a moment with well-bred insolence upon the girl from headquarters. "I didn't notice, I'm sure—ah, par-

don—— I came for Nanette, if you can spare her but a moment. Her father wants her," she continued. "Will you come with me, my dear?"

It was less a question than a command. Without waiting for a reply, she turned away and Nanette, her face an odd blend of hesitation and manifest dislike, followed. But as Mrs. Hoffman passed into the ballroom a tall, well-set-up man, with very blond hair, greeted her effusively. He might have been handsome save for a rather cruel, tight-lipped mouth and a roving eye that gave him a distinctly furtive air, scarcely in keeping with his rather bulky build.

His manner was distinctly proprietary, and as they moved off together Ruth Neville gazed after them with a speculative look. The growing intimacy between Harold Chelmsford and Nanette Hoffman was troubling her more than she cared admit, for the man was suspected of being a crook.

Walter, who had been watching his aunt, breathed a sigh of relief as she disappeared from sight.

"It may be undutiful," he growled, "and perhaps it's not playing the game, but what the governor saw in my amiable aunt——"

Miss Neville laughed low, yet with a tinge of reproof in the sound.

"A very lovely lady," she replied with frank admiration.

"Oh, she's beautiful enough," admitted the young man reluctantly, "if you like beauty on the heroic order. As for myself, I prefer beauty in—in——"

"Homeopathic doses," finished the girl detective, laughing.

"Precisely," he agreed, with a touch of moodiness. "There is less bitterness."

There was silence for a moment; then, as a door is opened and closed on the susurrus of traffic, there came to them the sound of the orchestra, the murmur of the dance. Walter Hoffman turned toward his companion abruptly with an impulsive gesture:

"Miss Neville," he asked gravely, "do you believe that a man could learn to love a woman in a month?"

The girl glanced at him obliquely, a faint stain of color in her cheeks.

"I think it might be possible," she said slowly, after a moment's pause. "But"—she met his eyes steadily—"if he asked my advice, I should say wait for at least a year."

Hoffman bent toward her, putting out his hand under the lights, the fingers of which trembled as if shaken by a wind invisible.

"I do not think he would take such advice," he said thickly. "At any rate, I shall not. I am too sure now. I could not wait. The woman I love now I shall love always. You know whom I mean, Ruth?"

"I—know," she answered gravely. "But I am going to ask you to take my advice. Do not ask her yet."

"But when—when may I?" he questioned, low, eager. "I must know——"

"Please!" she interrupted, in a visible distress. "Not now. I will tell you when——"

"Not a—year!" he pleaded.

The girl eyed him rather wanly, with the shadow of a smile.

"Perhaps you will not wish to in a—week," she murmured, so low that he could scarcely hear.

He was about to protest, but at that moment a noisy party joined them, and the young man sank back moodily in his chair. An instant later, however, he started up, as if on springs.

"There's a man I want to see!" he exclaimed. "Pardon — be back in a moment." And with the word he was away.

Ruth Neville looked after him, her eyes wide with a sudden dread. The man was Harold Chelmsford. It was not in her heart to doubt Walter Hoffman, but now she was conscious of an entering, thin wedge of sudden unease. Mechanically she arose, moving slowly, draggingly toward the door through which the two men had disappeared. She had promised to do her duty—that was the thought uppermost—but now——

Halfway there she became aware abruptly of a voice at her shoulder, tense, repressed. It was Casper Everett, the chief of detectives, smiling fatuously and holding out his hand as if in casual greeting.

"A tentative agreement was drawn up by cabinet officers late this afternoon," he whispered hurriedly. "Watch them! Chelmsford must not get it! We have reason to think young Hoffman has a copy and means to give it to him for a price."

The girl beheld him as in whirling mist, a fiery cloud in which he appeared somehow as a figure of doom, gigantic, like a djinn—those pitiless eyes, they seemed to probe, searching, searching her very soul, her thoughts. She swayed a moment, like a lily upon its stem; her voice came, strained and thin:

"You—*saw?*" she breathed.

He nodded, still with that half vacuous smile, but his eyes were hard, biting, twin frosty agates of implacable decision.

"Bemis and Anglim are outside," he told her grimly. "Chelmsford won't get away with it; but I'd prefer he did not see it at all. *Hurry!*"

The word hissed at her like a rapier thrust. Still smiling inanely, he passed on.

Ruth made her way through the crowd with what speed she might. She had no idea which direction the two men, Chelmsford and young Hoffman, had taken, but she pushed on blindly toward her objective, in her heart a prayer, and with it a hope and a crawling, desperate fear.

At the door a man, entering, almost swept her from her feet. It was Walter Hoffman.

"Hello!" he cried easily, before she could speak. "I didn't mean to leave you so abruptly, but the fact is I owed Chelmsford a pony. The beggar cleaned me at bridge this afternoon at the club and I wanted to square up."

Miss Neville released a sound between a gasp and a laugh. For a moment her eyes held his in a searching scrutiny; then, with a brilliant, hazy smile and a murmured excuse, she slipped by him out into the hall and beyond into the warm, fragrant air of the conservatory.

But even as she entered she halted, her heart hammering in her breast, her face on the instant drained of its color to a pasty whiteness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A MAN stood with his back toward her, head bent as if listening. He turned and she saw that it was Chelmsford. Then she stifled a quick word in her throat.

Hastening toward him, slim, dark, eager, lips parted in a tremulous smile, in her hand a long, official-looking envelope, there came Nanette Hoffman. For once at a loss, Miss Neville stood half concealed by a giant palm. She saw Chelmsford take the envelope, saw his eager down-glance, heard the low, explosive "Ha!" of satisfaction. His hand went swiftly to his pocket and then his fingers came away producing a packet — a small packet such as Everett had described—in a brown paper wrapping. He handed it to the girl.

Still Ruth Neville did not move. Not until Chelmsford, with a most un-English gesture, had raised Nanette's hand to his lips, turning with the motion, did her faculties resume at full tide. She turned blindly then and, still unseen, rushed from the conservatory.

She must find Detective Everett! But—and the sudden thought laid a chill upon her heart—Chelmsford would of course leave upon the instant. But he had not gone toward the main entrance. The house stood on a corner, and there was a door—a sort of postern giving upon the side street just back of the conservatory. In all probability he was out of the house by now.

Catching up a silk scarf, Ruth walked toward the main entrance, curbing her impatience by a hard-held effort of the will and moving comparatively slowly that she might not attract attention. At any moment now it might be too late. Her pulses hammered to the slow drag of her footsteps; with difficulty she beat down an impulse to run—to cry out. Haste, and yet more haste—speed and then more speed—now if ever was it vital. In imagination she visualized the progress of the tall figure of Chelmsford in Inverness cloak and top-hat: through the gate—into the street—the waiting car, its engine throttled down to a low, ominous purr, its driver waiting for the word—the gears meshed, the motor roared with a sudden, staccato clamor——

It was too much! Swerving from her course with a little stumbling rush, she had passed through the conservatory, down the shallow steps into an old-world garden, her heart hammering in her breast—and then—the gate.

She tugged at it in a fury of impatience; then, abruptly, at her muffled sob it fell open,

as if the very urgency of her desire had swung it wide.

Then—she fell back in dismay at the looming figure of a soldierly-looking man, slouch hat pulled low over his forehead, eyes gleaming in the luminous dusk. He laid a hand upon her arm.

At the touch she shrank; then, in a vast relief:

"Bemis!" she exclaimed. "Oh, hurry — hurry! Around the corner — Chelmsford — slipped out the side entrance! Hurry!"

The man touched his cap, his voice at once respectful and reassuring; it acted upon her fevered mood like a cool wind.

"Anglim is there, miss. Never you mind, ma'am, he won't get far!" answered Bemis. "But you had best go back, ma'am."

And he was gone around the corner, like a drifting shadow.

But Ruth Neville had no intention of returning. Instead, she followed Bemis. Up and down the wide avenue there stretched a long line of cars, and from somewhere just ahead there broke, on a sudden, the hoarse purr of an exhaust, stabbing the odorous dark with its clamor. And as she looked, straining her gaze against the shadowy gloom, a speed car swung out into the fairway with a plunging rush.

It was a powerful, low-hung roadster, and as it passed under the bright glare of a street arc the figure in the tonneau was plainly visible. It was Chelmsford, and—he was escaping. The girl gave backward one trembling step with a little cry:

"Bemis!" she called futilely. But even as her cry arose and died upon the night, abruptly the grotesque shadow of Anglim upreared above the back of the car. For a moment it bulked in a formless blot against the light of a nearby street-light; his arm arose, silhouetted against the glow. Then it fell, and she saw the figure of Chelmsford sink out of sight, as if he had been poleaxed.

The car came to a sudden halt as the startled chauffeur jammed down the brakes; but before he could turn the shadow of Anglim, like a projectile, had hurdled the intervening space. There was a sodden crash as again his arm rose and fell, and the chauffeur sagged forward limply in his seat.

"Anglim has earned his five thousand," said a quiet voice at her elbow—the voice of Everett.

But Anglim was not yet through. He had not quite earned his hire. There remained yet one detail. Neither Chelmsford nor the chauffeur had made an outcry, but the attack had been seen, and now from down the avenue there sounded voices, high-pitched, imperious, the quick blast of a whistle, and the pad-pad of running feet.

And then, even as they looked, a looming figure showed under the lights, behind it another, and in the far distance the rattle of a nightstick.

Everett vented an impatient exclamation, leaning forward in his eagerness like a sprinter upon his mark.

"What ails Anglim?" he muttered between set teeth, but even as he spoke from the black shadow of the car a bulky figure upreared against the moon, spread-eagled between earth and heaven. For a long second Anglim's figure appeared to hang, soaring like a huge bat against the light. There came the crash of a heavy .48 and the high whine of the slug as it went wide.

With a sweep of his arm Everett deposited the girl in an angle of the wall, even as the flying figure, unhurt, vaulted to the roadway. He landed running, with a high-pitched broken shout of defiance, or exultation, or both — then at a plunging rush he was upon them.

Bemis and Everett hurled themselves at the flying figure in a diving tackle. There was a tangle of arms and legs, a grunting oath, a straining clutch; then, as it seemed, they were flung aside and the figure had disappeared across the avenue.

Everett arose from the dust of the road and approached Ruth. Oddly, he did not act like a man who had staked his all and lost. There was a quiet smile on his lips, a gleam in his eyes, deep down, like a still fire.

"It's all right," he whispered, slipping something into his pocket. "I've got Chelmsford's envelope—the seal is unbroken. He hadn't time to read it. Got it from Anglim during the tussle. That crook feared prison — got cold feet after he did what we wanted him to do, and is now trying to get away."

The girl could only stare. In the moonlight she had seen that the escaping man had not been Chelmsford. She had supposed it was the chauffeur.

"But — but how did Anglim get it?" she asked. "And you let him get away!" she continued accusingly.

Everett grinned cheerfully.

"Oh, that was Anglim," he explained. "He seems to be gifted with a scent for this sort of thing. Rather unusual under the circumstances. He evidently saw the policemen and —well, you understand that the police and my — er — department operate on separate lines. So he beat it."

Wordless, she suffered him to lead her into the house and back to the conservatory. And there for a long minute she stood looking up at the detective numbly, pleadingly almost—the stern, handsome face, tinged just now with an odd, almost a revealing look.

"Who was it that gave Chelmsford the envelope?" he asked gently. "It wasn't Walter, I know that, for as it chanced I saw what passed between him and Chelmsford, although you missed it."

"Must I — tell?" she asked him, low, the proud head bent.

"It is imperative!" he answered sternly, but she could not see his eyes. "Chelmsford, I have no doubt, will find it rather more convenient to leave the country as soon as he recovers consciousness. But—I must know the other."

The girl raised her head then, staring at him with a dumb tongue. But she had promised—it was her duty! Odious word! For an instant she gazed about her as might a trapped animal—a wild thing of the woods snared by its own devising—then back again at the inexorable, cold mask that was the face of Casper Everett. Finally, so low that he could scarcely hear:

"Nanette!" she whispered.

Everett stared at her with a face blank in its utter astonishment. "Nanette!" he repeated woodenly. "Nanette! Impossible!"

And then the two froze rigid as they stood.

"Why am I 'impossible'?" asked a lilting girlish voice at his elbow.

Everett made a groping movement with his hand, but with an inarticulate cry Ruth gathered the girl into her arms. For a moment a little silence fell, a breathless pause. Then:

"Nanette," remarked Everett gravely, "I do not understand exactly, but will you tell me something? To-night you gave Chelmsford an envelope. What was in it?"

The girl looked from one to the other, her large eyes wide with surprise.

"Why, I don't know that it is a secret—at least from you. My stepmother——" There came a smothered sound from Ruth; a grim "Ha!" from Everett. "My stepmother gave me the envelope to give to Mr. Chelmsford. It had a check in it, she told me, to pay for something he had bought for her as a present to father, she said."

Everett and Miss Neville exchanged glances. In Nanette's face of a sudden came a brilliant smile, like the sun on water. She laughed aloud.

"A mountain from a molehill!" she cried gayly.

"You see, dear," said Ruth, "I saw Mr. Chelmsford give you a package—— He—he is not a nice man, and—oh, well, it doesn't matter, it's all right now! And here comes Walter. We — we won't mention this again."

Nanette moved forward impulsively toward Walter.

"What are you going to do?" Miss Neville whispered eagerly to Everett.

"See Mrs. Hoffman," answered the operative grimly. "I believe I can draw her fangs without any public exposure. Especially," he added with a whimsical smile, "as she has the ten thousand in hand paid."

Unconscious of the look in Everett's eyes, telling its story to whoever might have seen, Ruth turned to Walter, laying her hand upon his arm.

"Take me back to the billiard-room, please," she said a trifle wearily. But there was a light in her eyes, a look at once vital and alive and glad, as she added rather significantly:

"It seems a year since you left me."

The CLEAN-UP

by Dustin Mack

BARRY stepped from the beating rain into the shelter of a doorway at Main and Cambridge streets. The clock in the tower across Evergreen Square struck two. A vista of the town's central thoroughfare showed only the sickly gaslights on the corners. Then out of the mists appeared the dim glow of headlights. Three minutes later an automobile truck was lumbering around the corner into Cambridge street. It was heavily loaded.

As the machine made the turn and Barry —Policeman Barry—noticed that the contents were covered with a tarpaulin, he stepped out into the rain again and followed the truck. It had been an open secret that bootleggers were busy in Delmont. The papers were pounding the police.

Barry had gone two blocks, keeping well up to the slowly moving vehicle, when out from another doorway came a big, rain-coated figure. It was Roundsman Dell.

"Where are you going, Barry?" he hailed.

The patrolman pointed to the truck ahead.

"Yes," remarked Dell, "but you're off your beat. Go back and report to the chief at ten o'clock in the morning. Have your badge, keys and gun with you."

"You're right, Dell!" he said. "But I really didn't think. I wanted to see where that stuff was going, and I forgot everything else."

"Tell your story to the chief," replied Dell, stepping back into the doorway and waving Barry toward Main street with his nightstick.

At ten minutes after five Barry turned the key in the lock of the door of his home. He entered softly and lighted a gas-jet in the kitchen. On the table he saw a note from his wife:

"John was taken with the croup about twelve o'clock. I gave him the medicine the doctor prescribed the last time he was sick, but I had a hard job with him. He dropped off to sleep at three. If he wakes again give him another teaspoonful. I don't feel well myself. The medicine is on the mantelpiece."

Barry tiptoed into the bedroom and looked at the boy in his crib. He was breathing heavily. The father went back to the kitchen, closed the door, took off his collar, tie and coat and lighted his pipe. Not much sleep to-day, he figured. It wouldn't be worth while going to bed after John's mother got up, and there was no telling when he would get home after reporting to the chief. He pulled a rocker under the gas and tried to read the paper. He couldn't. He hoped John wouldn't have a bad spell like he had before. John had a bad throat and the croup was treacherous with him. Besides, Barry hadn't been

able yet to pay the doctor the last bill. He wondered what the chief would do about his being off the beat. But he would understand.

Barry, in civilian clothes, walked into headquarters at ten minutes of ten. John's condition hadn't been very encouraging when he left home. There was a suspicious gagging when he coughed. It sure did begin to look like membranous. But Barry had to hurry away. He didn't know what might happen if he was late, and he couldn't now, above all times, take a chance. At the door of headquarters he passed Patrolman Lewis. The latter smiled knowingly and just nodded. For twenty years now Lewis had been just a patrolman, but no one wondered why. He was wise in the ways of the force, kept within its laws but did no more work than he had to. He was happy as a peanut politician policeman. Barry despised him.

Chief Hall was at the desk alone in the room.

"Barry," he began, looking over his glasses, "I'm sorry it's you. But there's only one thing for me to do. Turn over your badge and gun. You stand suspended pending action by the commissioner."

Barry hardly expected this, but without a word he complied with the order. Then he took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"When will I get a hearing?" he ventured.

"Perhaps to-morrow morning. You might drop in and see the commissioner at his store."

"My pay, I suppose, stops until the case is disposed of?"

"That's the rule."

"Well, I have no one to blame but myself," said Barry. "But it hits me at a pretty hard time."

Commissioner Stimson, a cigar in his mouth, sat on the edge of a table in the back of his store—a stationery store—while a clerk was in front tending to customers. As Barry entered he saw Patrolman Lewis leave by a rear door. The suspended officer began to tell his story. For a few seconds Stimson listened in apparent impatience. Then he bit a piece from the end of his cigar, spat it on the floor and held up his hand as a silencer.

"Officer," he spoke at length, "I never transact police business here. One week from to-day you'll get a hearing at headquarters."

With that he walked to the front of the store and began to wait upon customers. He ignored Barry as the latter went out.

As the patrolman neared his home his heart sank. In front of the house he saw the doctor's automobile. He hastened his footsteps. He met the doctor coming out. But the physician was smiling.

"Barry," he greeted, "hurry in there. You have another little fellow to work for you when you grow old."

Barry found John playing about the floor. Mrs. Murray, the next-door neighbor, was in charge, and upstairs the mistress of the household was helpless in her joy with the little stranger lying at her side.

Barry was happy. But then came the specter of the thin pay envelope and the mounting bills. The baby would need lots of things and Johnny was getting at the age now where he was kicking a hole through his shoes almost every week. As for the girls — well, when their mother got around again she could manage to patch up their things, although it was only the other night that she remarked that Alice was in rags. But there was Bill. He simply had to have a suit. He was big now and beyond his mother's aid in the line of clothes. He had to be kept half respectable. In the fall, too, he would be entering—— Here Barry checked himself. How could he do it? But he would do it! He couldn't deprive Bill of the education he yearned. He would send him to the Tech. It would mean money—but he'd get along somehow. He'd have to manage it. If things would only pick up he might get off the force and get a job at something where he could put in extra time. But what was the use of thinking about that? Everywhere the factories were laying off men.

Barry walked to the window and watched out into the street. His massive shoulders were thrown back, his jaw set, his forehead wrinkled. Then into his eyes came the gleam of purpose. His was the figure that three years before had inspired his men of Company A—inspired them with a courage that was in his own breast. It was the war that set him back. He had not been compelled to

go over, but what had the National Guard been for if not to train men for war if war should come? In a closet of a bedroom upstairs a D. S. C. was now collecting dust. The spirit that carried him on in the days that were past was needed in the days that were to come. He packed his pipe with tobacco and, with the thought of his own little army now, began to hum, "Hail! Hail! The Gang's All Here!"

Then a limousine pulled up to the door. It contained Mrs. Whittaker, who had come to see the new baby. The doctor had told her. During the years before the war that he had driven her automobile she had bestowed on his family many little kindnesses which were never lost sight of.

Not for the world, Mrs. Whittaker declared, would she disturb Mrs. Barry. She would wait, however, until she awoke. So she sat in their little parlor talking. She was interested in the town, especially the police. Why was there so much law violation, gambling, whisky dealing, crime of all kinds? Barry didn't know, not exactly. But he had his suspicions.

On the day appointed for his hearing Barry found Stimson seated at a desk in his poky little office at headquarters. The commissioner kicked the door shut.

When the officer was through with his story Stimson rocked his chair back and forth and passed his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

"Officer," he finally spoke, "the fact remains that you were off your beat. You are guilty of a serious offense against the discipline of this department. With the department in bad and the newspapers watching for every chance to hammer us, we cannot afford to let things go along in a slipshod way. You stand fined thirty days' pay."

"Commissioner, I have a family and——" Barry began to plead.

But Stimson cut him short:

"The best way for a man to look after his family is for him to look after his job."

Barry went back to his home and lighted his pipe. Resentment burned within him. Had he done really some great wrong it would have been different. But this was rank injustice! This was the stuff that made men fight—and his blood was red.

On another rainy night a few weeks later Barry stood in the doorway at Main and Cambridge streets. But he was not alone. Beside him was a little man with his coat collar turned up about his neck, his hands in his trousers pockets and a cigarette between his lips. Now and then he'd screw up a corner of his mouth and, while still puffing at the cigarette, would lean his head toward the policeman and speak in hoarse whispers, although not another living thing was in sight. Barry listened attentively.

It is only in the night when law-abiding people are sleeping that one gets to know a town. Then one sees things as they really are. And the friends one makes! A word on a corner with this one, a chat in a doorway with that one. Night after night one meets them—workers, some of them; rounders, others; slick crooks, maybe, now and then. All of them see things that the sunlight hides. And when everything else is still they seem to like to talk. Frequently they grow confidential.

When Barry went home that morning he smoked an unusually long time before going to bed. He thought much of what the little man had told him. Then he left a note that he be called at nine—an unusually early hour.

"I have a little business in the city," he explained to Mrs. Barry after he arose. "I'll be back in a few hours."

Barry hopped from the streetcar in front of an imposing building. He entered, took an elevator two flights up and went along a corridor until he came to a door marked "County Prosecutor." He shoved it open and inside found the chief of the county detectives and a force of clerks. Barry asked for the prosecutor and was assigned a place in a line of chairs outside the official's private office. An hour passed before his turn came.

The prosecutor was interested in his story. When Barry was through the former lighted a cigar, leaned back in his swivel chair, put his hands behind his head and for a few seconds puffed away in silence. Then he suddenly leaned forward again and made some memoranda on a pad.

"Officer," he finally spoke, "I'm glad you came. Let things take their course. Leave the rest to us."

It was not many days afterward that the rift in the dark clouds appeared suddenly for Barry. Stimson sent for him.

"Officer," said the commissioner, "Chief Hall is getting old now, and he wants to retire. We need younger blood and he knows it. I have been casting about for a man to put in the chief's chair and I think I have found the right one in you."

"But I'm only a patrolman," said Barry. "What about the fellows who for years——"

"What we want, I say, is young blood, and I know of no law to prevent our going to the ranks to get it."

"Would I be chief in reality?" Barry asked.

"Your hands would not be tied," the commissioner assured him.

And so it came about that Barry found himself at the helm. Then on the very eve of the day on which he was to assume office he found himself again before the commissioner on charges, this time of a serious nature. Stimson, in his private office once more, looked upset.

"Barry," he said, "I hardly know what to do. It is distressing for me.. Here we are on the very day before you take up your work charged with an offense that, if proven, would mean the absolute ruination of your future. You deny it, but there are three witnesses against you."

Then Stimson walked up and down the floor several times, his brow knitted.

"I have silenced those witnesses for the time being," he went on, "and—but I ought not to do it. I want you, though, in the chief's chair. I will try to keep them silenced. I will give you the benefit of the doubt until—but there's no use trying to cross a bridge until we come to it. I was going to say that I would give you the benefit of the doubt until you show you are unworthy of my trust."

Barry went into the office with the tacit approval of the newspapers. And he soon began to justify their stand. The morale of the force was raised. Gamblers sought other haunts. Bootlegging was growing less. Then came a crisis in the career of the man raised from the ranks. It was six months after his induction into the job.

At one-thirty o'clock in the morning he was called from his bed by the ring of the telephone bell. He received the brief message, phoned to the lieutenant at police headquarters to get together six men and then he hustled into his uniform and out.

Less than one hour later Barry piled into an auto the six officers. The car shot down Main street and turned into Cambridge. Along the latter thoroughfare it went for a mile until it reached the outskirts. Then it pulled into a vacant lot and drew up in the shadow of trees. Lights were extinguished and the police waited.

It wasn't very long until a truck came. They saw it turn into a driveway opposite and eventually pull up in front of a large barn. Things began to happen. The barn door opened and several men came out. Noiselessly they began their work of transferring the contents of the truck to the barn.

Barry gave the word and the officers did the job with dispatch. Not a man got away. The goods seized—whisky and gin—were valued at $20,000. The chief had been a long time preparing for this raid. Of course, he could have made it before, but there were a lot of things that he had wanted to make sure of first. His case was complete now. Besides the goods he had documentary evidence to back up every allegation he was prepared to make.

The chief called for the patrol and with six prisoners—hirelings—went back to headquarters. Three officers were left to guard the seized goods. The prisoners were being slated when the phone bell rang.

"No! Not exactly insane," Barry said to the other end of the wire. "I saw a job for me, and I simply went ahead and did it. Why, I never looked at it that way. I am chief of the police department and I understood that my hands were not tied. No, I can hardly go there. You better come here. I was going to send for you, anyway."

It was less than twenty minutes later when Stimson's automobile pulled up to the door of headquarters.

"For more than a year now, commissioner,"

began Barry, "this town has been made sort of a clearing house for bootlegging. You have been growing rich. I have no objection to your making money, but I couldn't forget that I was under oath to do my duty."

Stimson leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"Barry, it seems to me that for a subordinate you have been speeding a little too fast. I am at the head of the police department."

"That, commissioner, doesn't give you the privilege of violating the law."

"But it does give me the privilege," replied Stimson, "of telling you — especially you — where you get off at."

The chief put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a paper which he unfolded.

"This," he explained, "is a warrant for your arrest, sworn out by me on a charge of selling whisky unlawfully in your possession."

Stimson laughed again.

"Chief," he asked, "aren't you playing with fire? You haven't, of course, forgotten that little charge that is hanging over your head? The witnesses are at my call at any time. Attacking a woman, as you know, is a state prison offense. I have the victim's woman friend ready to back her story. The third witness I do not care to mention at this time."

"Why not now?" asked Barry. "No one will hear you but I, and I already know it."

"Well, suppose you do!" said Stimson, a little testily. "Does your knowledge make your case any less grievous?"

"Considerably, because of the character of the witness," the chief replied. "Now, suppose I told you that against this third witness of yours I could put a witness whose word even you would be bound to respect."

"You'd have to show me!" declared Stimson, but a little of the jauntiness was gone from his air.

"I'll show you if necessary. Your third witness is Policeman Lewis, your petty aide. Mine is John Warren, prosecutor of this county!"

Stimson looked puzzled for a moment; then he regained his smile.

"But the woman!" he said, confidently.

"Suppose I told you," went on Barry, "that instead of having three witnesses you had but one—your friend Lewis? Suppose I told you that the two women who are at your call are detectives of the prosecutor's office? Stimson, to be plain, you tried to frame me—to manufacture a case to use as a club in an emergency like this. You were afraid of me from the beginning—afraid I might go ahead and do my duty as you knew I would see it——"

"But, why, then, did I appoint you?" interrupted Stimson, his smile now gone.

"You appointed me not because you liked me, or because you wanted me. From the first night I started to follow your whisky truck in Cambridge street you had me spotted. You appointed me because you did not dare refuse to comply with a request for my appointment made by the governor of this State, to whom you are looking for political advancement."

"Mrs. Whittaker's story," commented Stimson, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Yes, it is Mrs. Whittaker's story — and Mrs. Whittaker, with her husband's five-million-dollar estate handled by the governor's law firm, is quite apt to know what she is talking about.

"As I was saying," Barry went on, "you wanted to get something on me for your own protection. To save yourself in your crookedness—not only your bootlegging—you were going to blast my character and send me to jail if necessary. But you didn't figure on elemental laws of human nature. A crook can't command loyalty. I was informed of your conspiracy from the beginning. I consulted the prosecutor. He put into your path the women you eventually thought you were hiring to get me."

The commissioner was pale. His cigar had gone out. There was a tremor in his voice as he spoke.

"Barry," he began to plead, "I have a wife —a daughter——"

"As a certain police commissioner once said," cut in the chief, "when he was taking the bread and butter from the mouth of a patrolman out of luck: 'The best way for a man to take care of his family is by taking care of his job.'"

The DOUBLE DOUBLECROSS

by George Ethelbert Walsh

THE dense thickets of canebrake offered an excellent hiding-place, and Bruxton was congratulating himself on reaching the deepest part when the distant splash of water alarmed him. It could not be caused by a wild animal, for the impact of a human foot in mud and water has a totally different sound from that made by any four-footed beast.

Bruxton's ears had been trained to detect this slight difference in sounds. Therefore it was either Sheriff Gans trailing him or some stranger or local inhabitant wandering around in the all but impassable morass of mud, water, briers and wild canebrake.

Bruxton listened with beating heart for a repetition of the footfall, but either the owner had stopped or he was padding each foot on soft, cushiony tufts of wiry grass as he moved stealthily along. Under the circumstances it was wiser to remain in silent concealment than to splash aimlessly around to avoid the unknown.

It had been an unfortunate local affair for Bruxton, and the fear of arrest was dictated by a higher policy than mere personal safety. Until Powers came he was helpless to do anything, and any move he made in the open prior to that might spoil everything.

Sheriff Gans had already butted in enough. Three days before he had caught Bruxton looking through the window of old Jim Borden's house late at night, and on the theory that only those contemplating robbery or murder would spy on others in their home he had arrested him as a suspicious character. A night in the cold, drafty jail of Millertown was intolerable, and so Bruxton had quietly vacated it by an exit of his own making.

Instead of leaving Millertown at once, he prowled around in the vicinity of his recent mishap, and ran plump up against a more serious crime. In the dead of night a shot came from Borden's home. Bruxton's curiosity got the better of him and he tiptoed to a window.

The sight inside rather upset him. Old man Borden lay on the floor weltering in his own blood with a bullet wound through his forehead. Bruxton drew back hastily and grunted with alarm, as well he might, for around the corner of the shack with gun drawn came Sheriff Gans.

"Hands up!" he shouted.

Bruxton's wits never failed him in an emergency and he saw instantly the consequences of the only two courses open to him. If he surrendered, Gans would prove a clear case against him, and circumstantial evidence would easily convict him of the murder of Jim Borden. The other course was just as risky, more so it would seem to some; but Bruxton decided instantly to take it.

He threw up his hands as directed and then with the agility of an acrobat he dropped to the earth, rolled sideways into the brush, and like a rabbit scurried for shelter in the thick wood. Gans sent bullets rattling after him, but either the man was a poor shot or the darkness spoilt his aim.

Bruxton knew the swamp of wild cane-brakes was his safest hiding-place, for even bloodhounds are thrown off the scent where more water than land prevails.

He doubted if Gans had trailed him. Still he could take no chance. He waited patiently for the footsteps to approach or recede. After a while they splashed around again, distantly and faintly at first and then nearer and louder. But he knew that it was accident rather than design that directed them toward his hiding-place.

Peering through the interlacing branches he finally caught sight of a human figure and face. Intense relief came to him when he recognized Tony, the chauffeur, whose presence down there near the swamps had been one of the reasons for his remaining. Tony was lost or looking for something. He was unaccustomed to such wet places, and was by nature dainty and fastidious. Those small, pointed feet were made to tickle the accelerator of a high-powered car and not to jack-rabbit around from bog to bog in a morass of mud and water.

Suddenly he stopped and listened. Some one else was splashing along, making his way in the same general direction. Bruxton frowned and dropped lower in his hiding-place, working his way down until the slimy water seeped up and saturated his clothes. A soft whistle broke the stillness and Bruxton had a feeling that he had accidentally stumbled upon something interesting aside from his own troubles.

Sheriff Gans came splashing through the swamp, unmindful of noise and clatter. "Tony," he called, peering through the brakes, "you got to get out of here before another daybreak. I can't protect you after to-night. Some of 'em are fur lynching you right off the bat. I had hard work holding 'em back."

The natty chauffeur turned deathly white, and his teeth chattered. "I want to go," he whined. "I'd go now if—— Ugh! This—this swamp is frightful! I got lost in it and was stuck in the mud. Hell! Ain't that a snake?"

Gans replied by swatting a creeping reptile and kicking its dead carcass into the bushes. Tony drew forth a cigarette and lighted it to calm his nerves, his hands trembling like a leaf.

"You'll have to stay in hiding until dark," continued the sheriff. "Then crawl back to the corduroy roadway. I'll have your car there."

"I could go now," whined the youth, "if I had the big car. They couldn't ever catch me."

"Well, we won't risk it," replied Sheriff Gans. "We'll wait until dark. Now keep in hiding. They're all-fired mad and want a lynching. Jim Borden had a host of friends in Millertown, and your shooting him down——"

"I didn't shoot him!" cried Tony sharply. "It's a lie! I was nowhere near his home that night, and I didn't hurt him."

"Don't make much difference, Tony. The folks believe you're the murderer and that's enough. A hot-headed mob wouldn't stop to listen to explanations. Better take my advice and skip the county and state—get back up North where your friends are."

Tony looked as if he would gladly go by airplane or any other quick conveyance if it were possible. Bruxton tried to piece the bit of information the conversation had given him with other facts. If Tony was suspected of murdering Jim Borden, then clearly he was not himself a fugitive from justice for the crime, and there was no need of hiding longer in that snake-infested inferno. He weighed this carefully, and waited.

"I got a wire from Steve," the sheriff went on, "and it's all O. K. You're to go North, and I'll clean up this little disturbance. I want you out of the state before I spring my little evidence. I got it all cooked up then. See?"

Bruxton was more interested than Tony, and *he* clearly could not see. Ten minutes later, when Gans left the swamp, he debated some time between hiding or making his pres-

ence known to Tony. He chose the latter course finally, and crashing through the swamp he nearly frightened the little chauffeur out of his wits.

"Hello, Tony, you lost in the swamp, too?" he greeted. "Then we ought to be pals in misery. Got a cigarette and a match? Thanks, awfully! A smoke mends one's nerve. Seen any snakes? Holy mackerel! I've killed dozens of 'em since last night!"

He drew smoke and exhaled it through his nostrils. "Say, what are you doing in here, Tony?" he asked suddenly, leaning forward. The chauffeur turned pale and stammered a weak lie.

"Hell!" interrupted Bruxton. "Don't tell a lie as if you didn't believe it! Now I'll tell you the truth. You're here because you're afraid of being lynched. Don't I know? I heard the mob grumbling. They want you, Tony, for shooting Jim Borden, the postmaster of Millertown!"

"I didn't!" hoarsely cried the fugitive.

"Well, then, who did?"

"I don't know! God knows, I'm innocent! I didn't know anything about it until Gans called me out of bed and said the mob was after me, and I'd better flee to the swamp."

"Gans did, eh? Isn't Gans sheriff?"

"You know he is," scowled Tony.

"Then, why'd he warn you? Isn't it the duty of the sheriff to apprehend the murderer and not warn him?"

"Gans knows I didn't shoot Borden."

"He does, eh?" There was a cold, menacing tone in the voice that made Tony look up anxiously. He met a pair of steel-blue eyes that bored straight through him.

"Tony," Bruxton said, "you're only a tool in this game, and a clumsy one at that. Gans is double-crossing you. He and Steve want to get rid of you so they can divide the swag. Hence this trumped-up job that the people are hunting you to swing you for killing Borden. They're not!"

Tony eyed the speaker in bewilderment. "You just said they were!" he stammered.

"Yes, I know, but I lied! They're hunting some one else to lynch."

"Who?" shouted Tony.

"Never mind," was the cool retort. "Now get this straight. You brought the goods down here in the swamp in your car under Steve Batten's orders, and met Sheriff Gans, who naturally gave you a clean bill of health. Don't you think Gans could free you of this murder charge if he wanted to?" Bruxton leaned forward and added: "Gans was there at the cabin when Jim Borden was shot, Tony. Remember that!"

"Damn him!" hissed the chauffeur. "If he's trying to double-cross me, I'll cut out his liver."

"Just so," smiled Bruxton. "But there's a better way. Listen!"

Tony shot him a quick glance. "Who are you, anyway?"

Bruxton stood the sharp scrutiny smilingly. Theirs had been only a casual acquaintance. Tony had given him a lift one day, and they had talked of New York from which city they both claimed origin.

"Who the hell are you?" Tony repeated with variation.

"Never mind that. I doubt if you'd know me if I told you. Even this, I'll bet, you wouldn't recognize."

He held out a circular piece of metal with a queer stamp on it. Tony clutched at it, gasped and turned white.

"Well, how is it?" added Bruxton sharply. "I've shown you my hand. Now it's a choice between Gans and me. Take time to think it over. There's no great hurry. In fact, I'm waiting in this swamp for a certain little thing to eventuate."

Tony's pasty face underwent many subtle changes, registering fear, rage, craftiness, sheer desperation. He was a criminal by heart and instinct, and a willing tool of criminals, with a record that was far from savory. Steve Batten, the head of the most notorious gang of post-office thieves, had not picked him up and corrupted him by his evil ways. Tony had been corrupted from youth through the blood of his ancestors and the slum environments in which he had been reared. Yet wasn't it worth while taking a chance on a human derelict, trusting he would come through straight if given a helping hand? Bruxton wondered.

"I'll say this, Tony," Bruxton went on after

a pause, "I didn't suspect Sheriff Gans until the other day. When I trailed you down here I knew Steve Batten had another agent on this end, but Gans was the last one I thought of. Steve knew his man all right, I guess. Gans is a power down here in Millertown. It will be hard work to make the people think evil of him."

"I wish I was out of it," whined Tony. "I didn't want to come down here. This swamp is terrible. Its smells make me sick."

"Smoke another cigarette and forget it," cheered Bruxton, smiling. "And while you're doing it, Tony, give me your answer."

"What answer?" truculently.

Bruxton flipped his cigarette into a pool of turgid, muddy water and listened to its hiss that sounded so much like a reptile's challenge that Tony shivered. "It's your choice, Tony, of 'fessing up and telling me everything, in which case I'll do my best to protect you as a government witness, or keeping mum and trusting to Gans and Steve pulling you out. The only condition I make is that you go through the motions of taking orders from Gans as if nothing had happened."

"You want me to leave this swamp and go North?"

"If Sheriff Gans says so—yes."

"Then—then, I've decided," gulped Tony.

"Which way?"

"You know—yours."

Bruxton paused to watch the weak face a moment. "You throw yourself unconditionally on my mercy? You will confess everything? Tell me where the loot is hidden?"

"I'll tell you all I know. I brought the swag down here in my car and handed it over to Gans. What he did with it I don't know."

"Sure?"

"Absolutely positive! I'll swear on——"

"Don't do it! It isn't necessary. I know where it's hidden."

Tony's eyes opened and a sickly smile creased his lips.

"You know the old ruined cane mill in the middle of the swamp," continued Bruxton quietly, "the one that stands at the head of the bayou? You can reach it by a flat-bottom boat or by an automobile, if you're a good driver. Tony," leaning forward suddenly, "were you ever there?"

For an infinitesimal fraction of a minute the little chauffeur hesitated, and then nodded his head, his lips murmuring a weak affirmative. Bruxton added harshly:

"I thought so. Then why'd you lie to me? You helped Gans secrete it under the mill?"

Tony whitened the color of bleached cotton, his face working spasmodically. Bruxton rose to his feet.

"Tony, I want you to take me to that mill," he said authoritatively. "Come!"

Without a word the abject chauffeur rose and walked in the direction of the corduroy road. Bruxton followed at a convenient distance. In his long experience as a post-office detective he knew the type of criminals he was dealing with. Tony would be docile and obedient when the odds were against him, but once let him see a ray of hope and he would wriggle and twist and turn like a snake to strike.

They came out on the abandoned corduroy road running into the swamp and terminating at the old cane mill at the head of the sluggish bayou. In former days the road had been a good one, made of solid logs laid close together, but time and the elements had rotted and depressed many of them so it was difficult for any vehicle to negotiate the winding way. Bruxton felt a little admiration for the daredevil driver who had taken his car clear into the swamp on that road without a mishap; but then he knew Tony was a past master in driving.

The case had been complete against Tony and Steve for some time, but Bruxton was not ready to spring the trap until the Southern agent of the gang had been entrapped. For days and weeks he had suspected Jim Borden, the old postmaster at Millertown, and kept him under his own personal surveillance. He was sorry now that his suspicions had wronged the old man, particularly so that it automatically implicated his daughter Jean, who had taken most of the burdens off her father's hands.

It was one of the unfortunate requirements of Bruxton's profession that he had to be ab-

solutely impersonal in his dealings with those who came under his surveillance, and while his heart dictated one thing his intellect often pointed another way. He had even suspected Borden up to the time of his death, reasoning that it was a case of suicide to escape the penalty of his doings, and Sheriff Gans's butting in had been merely chance. Not until he had overheard the conversation in the swamp was he sure that he had been on a false clue.

Powers, his assistant, was dogging the trail of Steve Batten, ready to arrest him on word from Bruxton and close in on the Southern gang with all the men he could collect. Bruxton had sent a cypher telegram to his assistant the morning after his few hours of enforced idleness in the Millertown jail. Discretion had warned him to keep in hiding until the arrival of Powers.

The subsequent events had complicated the situation at first, and then with wonderful clarity unraveled the tangled skein. Jim Borden was innocent of any wrongdoing, or if he was a member of the gang he was no longer wanted. Sheriff Gans knew who had shot him in his home. It had been a shrewd move of his to fasten the guilt first on Bruxton, and then on Tony. He needed a victim to satisfy the enraged populace and Bruxton's stumbling upon the scene at the opportune moment had provided one.

As to Tony, Bruxton concluded the lynching party was not looking for him at all. Gans had concocted the story to frighten the chauffeur away. He wanted to get rid of him. Was it a plot to double-cross Steve, too—Steve Batten, the master mind of the wholesale mail robberies that had extended from coast to coast and made two different postmaster generals lose sleep in trying to detect them?

Bruxton could not say, but he was going to find out. Heretofore he had been playing a silent hand; now he was coming out into the open, taking the chance that so often spells success or disaster. After all, the loot might not be in the old cane mill. He had searched it in vain, going over every part of it in the stillness of the night. Everything pointed to the trail ending here, but he wasn't sure—one was never sure in such matters until he had his hands on whatever he was after.

They reached the corduroy road and followed it, slipping and jumping from one dry spot to another, until they came out in an opening. What was left of the cane mill was in plain sight. Also a man, who watched the approaching pair a second, and then disappeared inside.

Bruxton uttered an exclamation of annoyance. He had forgotten the watchman, who for no reason whatever, it seemed, spent his days in the mill. Either he was a tool of Gans and Steve or a native in the employ of the owners of the mill, as he claimed. Bruxton had casually exchanged conversation with him, asking for directions through the swamp.

"Who is the watchman, Tony?" he asked now.

"Don't know!" was the sullen answer. "Never met him."

"Wasn't he here the day you brought the loot?"

"I never seen him before!" persisted the chauffeur.

Bruxton entered the tumble-down doorway of the deserted mill and peered through the interior darkness. Heines, the watchman, wasn't in sight. The mill had an evil smell, the mixed odors of stagnant water, rotten wood and sour cane. The floor across which he stepped yielded to his tread like punk.

"Heines!" he called, his voice echoing through the roomy, cavernous place. There was no answer. Tony paused on the threshold. "God, you don't want me to enter that stinking place, do you?" he pleaded.

"No, but I want you to watch the doorway. If any one comes, whistle."

Bruxton was sure the watchman was somewhere around and that he heard. Why he was hiding he could not guess, unless he was in league with Gans.

"Heines!" he called again. Then seeing a shadow move ahead, skulking behind a row of posts, he added: "Heines, it's no use hiding. I see you. Come out or I'll——"

Instinct rather than sight or hearing warned Bruxton to dodge just as a flash of light cut the darkness and a bullet grazed his forehead. It missed him, but it clarified

the situation. His return fire was almost instantaneous, but Heines had time to dodge the bullet.

After that in the dark, gruesome place, with the smell of sour cane in the nostrils and the fear of lurking snakes in the mind, it was a case of hide-and-seek. Tony had vanished at the first shot, and Bruxton dared not approach the light of the doorway to get out into the open. Heines jiggled an empty barrel and drew his fire, and then instantly flashed back with a bullet that almost ended the game.

"He's no fool native," Bruxton said to himself. "He's a gunman, all right. The kind Steve hires."

They stalked each other in silence or lay hidden behind casks and barrels, waiting for the other to show himself. The game grew monotonous to Bruxton, and he tried to force the issue. He flattened out on the damp, slimy floor and began crawling on his belly, wriggling his way in the direction of the last shot. He was almost there when there came a crash, a swift flash of light, and the world seemed to end for him.

When Bruxton opened his eyes again he was in a sort of sub-cellar under the old mill, with his arms and legs securely bound. Heines stood over him with a gun in position. Tony sat on an up-ended cask, talking loudly and volubly, while opposite stood Sheriff Gans in an attitude of sneering contempt. But it was not any or all of these that startled the confused Bruxton. It was the dark, burly man, with the curly hair and snapping black eyes, listening judiciously near the trap-door that gave him the shock of his life.

"Steve Batten!" he muttered to himself.

Then for fear of betraying himself he closed his eyes and feigned sleep, unconsciousness, death.

"You're a sneaking toad of a liar!" Gans broke in upon the silence of the place.

Tony leaped to his feet and clawed futilely at the air. his face working with anger. "You —you——" he began passionately.

Gans kicked him in the stomach and shoved him back.

"Toad!" he murmured. Then turning to Steve, he added: "If you want to believe that snake I wash my hands of the whole affair."

Steve's smile was not pleasant. "Tony never tried to double-cross me before," he replied suavely. "I think you must be mistaken, Gans. Now where is the loot hidden?"

"Ask Tony. He knows. He slipped it out of this old mill and then hid it somewhere else."

"A likely story, sheriff," sneered Steve. "A very likely story. How could he do it with Heines on guard?"

"Damned if I know! Ask Heines."

The dummy watchman turned around.

"I was away at night," he answered. "I wasn't paid to guard the mill after dark. Damned if I'd stay in the spooky old place after dark for all the kale in the world. He might have done it then."

"Who?" drawled Steve. "Tony or Gans?"

The sheriff ripped out an oath and drew his gun, but Steve was ahead of him. "Cut that out, Gans," he ordered curtly. "You Southern sheriffs may be quick on the trigger, but give me a New York gunman every time for beating you to it. Now I want to get at the bottom of this. Either you, Tony or Heines know where that stuff is hidden, and I'm going to find out which, if I have to shoot each one of you in turn."

"You'd have a hell of a time doing it, I reckon," sneered the sheriff. "You think you got me, but you've another guess coming. I reckon this swamp is spooky enough, but it will be spookier when a few more spirits haunt it. You get me? I'm sheriff down here!"

The significance of the last remark was not lost on Steve, but his gun-hand never wavered, and his lips flickered with a sneering smile. Suddenly his eyes drifted to their prisoner, still feigning unconsciousness, and a perceptible glimmer of humor or grim amusement flashed in them.

"You may be sheriff down here, Gans," he said slowly, "with the power to enforce your will, but I reckon you're up against it hard with him"—nodding at Bruxton. "How about it?"

Gans looked bewildered. "Him!" he

sneered. "Why, he's nothing but a bum, wanted for the murder of Jim Borden. I reckon the mob will settle him if I once let 'em get him. They're dying for a lynching party."

"Then the sooner you turn him over to them, Gans," was the dry retort, "the better it will be for all of us. He'll have the whole power of the federal government down on us if we let him utter a peep or look inside a telegraph office."

"Him! That bum! Who the hell is he, d'you suppose?"

"You don't know? And I thought you had brains, sheriff! He's the head of the post office squad of inspectors—Dug Bruxton, sometimes called Slim Dug."

Sheriff Gans grunted incredulously. "The hell he is!" He took a step toward Bruxton and peered curiously down at him. "He don't look like no detective to me," he sneered. "More like what I first took him for—a plain bum." He kicked Bruxton with a heavy boot. "Hey, wake up! You been sleeping long enough. Get me?"

The prodding boot threatened to injure the prisoner for life, and to avoid any such mishap Bruxton opened his eyes and tried to struggle to an upright sitting position on the cellar floor.

"Want me, sheriff?" he muttered sleepily, his mind wandering. "Yes, of course I saw it—was looking through the window at the time. You took a quick shot at him, sheriff, and killed him in a second. Poor Borden didn't have a chance—just keeled over and grunted once. Ha! Ha! That was a good one, sheriff, trying to put the killing on me. You almost did it, too!"

"What the hell's he talking about?" cried the sheriff in amazement, but not until his cheeks had blanched a little.

Steve chuckled, which increased the other's angry agitation. He turned as if to whip out his own gun, but Steve still held the drop which he had not once relinquished.

"You mumbling loonatic!" he growled. "Wake up!"

"Of course it was a joke, sheriff, trying to put the blame on me," continued Bruxton. "I told Jane that. Jim Borden's Jane. Poor Jane, it nearly keeled her over, to have her daddy shot in cold blood. But of course you had to do it. Jim knew your secret, and he was going to squeal on you — that was it, wasn't it?"

Gans turned livid and began trembling. Steve smiled at his agitation.

"Even in his delirium, Gans, Slim Dug has the thing sized up. You shot Jim Borden to protect yourself, and then tried to pass the murder off on Bruxton. That's plain as day."

"You lie, both of you!" shouted the excited sheriff. "I'll kill this man, and then——"

"Just a minute, sheriff," interrupted Steve in a cool voice. "You've tried to double-cross me in hiding that swag I sent down here by Tony. No man can do that and get away with it. But we'll forget it if you'll play fair now. We've got to make a quick getaway or we'll both lose out. Do you know what Slim Dug's presence down here means? No? Then I'll tell you."

He paused a second, then leaned forward impressively:

"It means this, sheriff, if it means anything. He's traced Tony down here, trailed him into the swamp, found out all he wants to know and within twenty-four hours Millertown will be swarming with his men. They'll surround us, and there'll be no getting away. We've got to get out of here pretty damn quick and take that kale with us."

"I'm sheriff down here——" Gans began, making an earnest effort to bolster up his courage.

"Yes, and that will have about as much effect on the post-office detectives as if you said you were the town fool. They'd laugh at you, and take you before a United States marshal who'd land you in a federal jail. Better think quick, sheriff, and think right!"

"What y'want me to do?"

"'Fess up where that stuff is, and then the two of us can divide it and go our separate ways. Of course, Tony and Heines come in for their share. They've played straight, I take it."

Gans glowered down at Bruxton, a murderous light in his eyes. "I'd like to kill him first," he growled.

"Do the killing afterward. I won't interfere. You can have Slim Dug all to yourself then. Is it a deal?"

The sheriff nodded his head finally.

"I reckon it is—that is," suspiciously, "if what you say is God's truth."

"It is, so help me!"

"Gans's shifty eyes swept the faces before him. Then a crafty smile of cunning parted his lips. "I reckon now," he drawled, "you're standing mighty close to the money. Hit them loose bricks in that chimney back of you, an' they'll easily fall out. The stuff is back of 'em."

Even then Steve's caution did not desert him. "Tony," he said, still holding the drop on the others, "dig in there and see what you can find."

Tony, the natty chauffeur, obeyed with alacrity. He pawed at the bricks, tumbling them down on the floor with a lot of soot and ashes. Then followed other things — packages of bills, loose money orders, bundles of Liberty bonds, papers tied up in tape or rubber bands, a collection of securities and cash that represented a dozen mail robberies in different parts of the country.

The three robbers gazed at the wealth with bulging eyes. No one spoke until the last package had fallen to the floor of the dimly lighted sub-cellar. Then a curious thing happened. The prisoner chuckled and spoke — spoke in his delirium again, Gans and the others thought:

"That's slick work, Powers. You'll get a promotion for that. Now loosen this rope. It's cutting to the bone."

"I certainly shall!"

"Thanks!" said Bruxton when relieved of his bonds.

The sheriff turned on him with a snarl and then back at Steve, who was smiling inscrutably. "That's all I wanted, sheriff," the latter said, "the hiding place of the loot. Now put up your hands!"

"You—you double-cross me!" snarled Gans. "You Northern toad!"

He would have drawn and taken the chance in a duel with guns, but a powerful hand behind caught him and twisted his arm until it cracked. The door behind had opened and through it three alert figures entered. Heines and Tony were too puzzled and amazed to resist until they were disarmed. Then Steve cut the rope that bound Bruxton.

"A very successful coup, Powers," the latter added, addressing Steve. "Not a hitch in it. You saw Jane and got her story?"

"Yes, chief. She gave us the full details of how Gans had tried to trick and intimidate her father, and then finding he had gone too far for his own safety he shot him in cold blood."

"He'll hang for that!" Bruxton interrupted. "He deserves it, the scoundrel."

Rubbing his limbs to restore the blood to its normal circulation, he continued: "You got Steve all right, I suppose?"

"Yes, landed him soon's I got your telegram, and then hustled down here to carry out orders."

Bruxton smiled his satisfaction. "That disguise is almost perfect, Powers," he added. "It deceived even Tony and Heines. The only thing wrong about it is the left eye. Steve's had a slight cross in it. But that's hard to imitate, very hard. Well, let's clean up here and get away with our prisoners."

The three prisoners had been stupefied into silence by the swift turn of events, and they still winked and blinked as if unable to grasp the full significance. Tony was the first to gather his wits.

"Good God!" he uttered explosively. "Ain't you Steve?" He stared with bulging eyes at the latter, who indulged in a smile, and then slowly began removing his disguise. With features somewhat similar to Steve Batten's, the notorious leader of post-office thieves, Powers had not found it very difficult to make of himself an understudy of his prisoner, and when he appeared in Millertown not one of his followers had suspected him as being other than their leader. As he stood before them undisguised, Tony raised his hands and said:

"Good God, it ain't Steve!"

"Hell!" exploded Sheriff Gans. "I've been a damn fool!"

Heines chewed his cud of tobacco, masticating it slowly, and then nodded. "Yep! So you have! Me, too!"

SISOWATH

by

O.W. Simons

Fanciful and grotesque stories of purely the imaginative kind are sometimes intensely interesting. "Sisowath" makes no pretension of a scientific basis; it was merely a peculiar idea, developed into story form to amuse its author, but possesses sufficient fiction merit to warrant its publication.

—*The Editor.*

"THEN we have made one more mistake. You are sure this is the Mekong river?"

"Of a certainty."

"We should have taken the road to the left at Laing, confound the luck!"

"I suggested——"

"To be sure you did. But what are we to do now?"

There was no answer.

"I hate to turn back. There is a crossing at Cam Penh."

The rough cart, drawn by a team of bullocks, had stopped at the edge of a murky stream a mile or so in width, along whose banks grew banyans, cocoanut and arica palms, a thick growth of liana vines forming an impenetrable tangle at their roots.

Hugh Douglas, in search of a certain peculiar adventure, found himself for the ninth or tenth time hopelessly at sea; but on each occasion the difficulty had been solved and, with the uncrushable savoir-faire, it seemed would be straightened out once more.

Sisowath, a Buddhist savant, of whom a story had reached the wealthy American of certain occult demonstrations, a subject in which he was deeply interested, had brought him to Saigon, Cochin China. From thence by devious ways the better part of his pilgrimage had been put behind him. A Siamese cook and two native Cambodians made up his party. The cart, well-laden, had served its purpose as a means of transportation. Thanks to the French, the roads so far were found in an admirable state. If this was the Mekong then the village of Cam Penh could not be far away, Douglas decided upon referring once more to what had proved a reliable map.

"We have lost at least a day by coming this way," he said, when he had satisfied himself of their present position.

"It is the will of Allah." The cook made the remark in a general way.

"I wish Allah would be a little more considerate," muttered the American under his breath.

The bullocks were once more put in motion with every prospect of reaching Cam Penh before nightfall. Swarms of buzzing, stinging insects, the damp heat, mayhap, were also the will of Allah. At times they were hard to bear, though. But what is worth having

is worth struggling for and ultimate success seemed sufficient compensation for these petty inconveniences.

"Sir, some one is calling." It was one of the Cambodians who spoke, breaking in on Douglas's meditations.

Turning to look back along the road, he saw a young native girl struggling through the snarl of vines. She had just reached the road when a stout, powerful fellow, dressed more in the Turkish fashion and wearing a turban, came crashing after her and seized hold of a scarf that was wound about her waist and shoulder. The thing came loose in his hand and the maid, on solid ground at last, was flying along the road toward the Douglas party. Before she could cover the intervening distance her pursuer had caught up with her and had laid hold of her arm. So violent were her struggles that she again broke away till finally, when he was once more beside her, he picked her up in his arms. Even then she kicked and screamed with such energy that Douglas decided to learn the rights of the trouble.

"What has the girl done that you will not allow her her freedom?" he called.

The man scowled and muttered something that even if the American had heard he would not have understood.

"He says she's his daughter," the cook volunteered.

"I'm not; I'm not! Save me! He's a——" The man clapped his hand over her mouth and turned to move on. The girl had spoken in fairly good English, much to Douglas's surprise. To see any woman treated this way was more than he could endure.

"Put her down!" he commanded.

The girl's captor turned his head and shouted something, but kept on his way.

Gifted with unusual strength, Douglas, at the fellow's side in an instant, had gripped him roughly by the neck, half turning him about, and followed this by a twist of the forearm that forced him to release the girl. She would have fallen on her back had not Douglas dexterously caught her and set her on her feet.

Not waiting for any parley the man aimed a blow at Douglas which was easily parried. Big and powerful as the ruffian appeared to be, he was no match for the athletic traveler, whose fist shot out, landing accurately on the man's jaw and sending him sprawling in the brush at the side of the road. Most any mortal would have been satisfied to quit after having felt the power of that good right arm, but not so with this reckless scamp. Once again on his feet, breathing hard and mumbling native imprecations, he came again to the attack, and this time he got enough to satisfy him of his folly. A battery of rapid blows landed about his head and neck, winding up with a jolting smash over the heart that stretched him helpless on his back, and this time he stayed there for a while.

During the one-sided encounter the American's three helpers stood near at hand delighted witnesses of the affray. Farther in the background the girl had taken up a position and she, too, showed her appreciation of the punishment meted out to her would-be captor. When the end had come the cook stepped forward to look down on the fallen man, an expression of wonder on his face. The victim lay groaning and gripping his chest.

"Bring some water," Douglas ordered. When this had been done he directed the bathing of the fellow's head and in a little while he was able to sit up. The look he directed toward Douglas was full of concentrated hate, but he wisely held his peace.

The girl had come over to Douglas's side. She had the refined eyes so prevalent among the East Indians. Her features were regular, the general contour pleasing, her age not more than nineteen or twenty. "He is a very bad man," she said, indicating the prostrate ruffian.

"How came you to learn English?" Douglas asked.

"I live in Calcutta two—three year," she replied.

"Who is this fellow?" he questioned.

"He is a robber, what you call—bandit. He know my father when I was a little girl and he wanted to take me away then. My father drove him out of our house and we didn't see him any more for a long time. Then my father died and I went to Calcutta. I live with an Anglise (English) family till they go

home and then I come here. Muyara find me in village and he want me to go away with him. He is terr-re-ble rascal." She stamped her foot. "My father would *kill* him."

"And of course you refused to go," Douglas suggested. "How did you happen to be here?"

"They catch me las' night."

"They?"

"Yes; in the boat."

"I see no boat. Where?"

"You cannot see here. It is jus' around the bend. Down there," she indicated.

"And you got away?"

"Yes. They stopped at the bank for some bananas. I jumped out."

"Well, shall we take you on to Cam Penh with us?"

"Oh, thank you ver' much. I am grateful." She made a serious little bow.

At this point the fallen man got up on one knee and when he had rested so for a moment he held out his hand to one of the Cambodians, who came forward and helped him to his feet. It was with a slow and unsteady gait he took his way back along the road.

The girl picked up her gaily colored scarf, which she fastened around her body again and at Douglas's invitation seated herself beside him on the cart, which was at once set in motion.

The injured man continued on his way, not turning once, and as he reached the bend in the road he was joined by two other figures. There was a waving of arms, but no move to follow the bullock cart and presently the three turned off into the bush toward the river.

"What is your name?" Douglas asked the girl.

"Eliya Nuwara."

"Born near here?"

"No; in a small village near Cuong."

"Cuong," the American repeated to himself. "That is in the province of Annam." He referred to a notebook. The great Sisowath in search of whom he had made this extended journey was to be found somewhere in that neighborhood.

"It isn't possible——" he began. It seemed that it could not be possible that this girl should have heard of the Buddhist philosopher. To ask the question was useless, silly.

Eliya waited for him to continue, puzzled. "I do not understand," she said at last.

Douglas laughed. "Why, you see, I am here all the way from America to find a very learned bonza (priest), Sisowath. You——"

"Sisowath! Oh, I ask you to go back to your home again. I have seen him—yes."

"Why, is there anything so terrible about him?"

The girl looked fearfully about as though she might be overheard. "I am afraid. I cannot tell you. Go back to your home."

"I like to be frightened," Douglas said, smiling. "Tell me what you know."

"I am afraid. I saw him once in the hills."

"Won't you tell me?"

The girl gave a negative shake of the head. No amount of argument would prevail.

"Well, at least you can tell me the way to Cuong, your home?"

"I will if I must, but it would be better for you not to go."

Eliya began an elaborate recital of the roads to be taken.

"Wait," Douglas interrupted. "I'll make a map."

Once more the notebook was requisitioned. Pencil in hand, he jotted down the turns and twists as indicated till he had a fairly accurate plan.

During this conversation the cart had jolted steadily along here and there through forests of teak, kapok, sao and tamarind, innumerable monkeys chattering in the branches, paying not the slightest attention to the travelers. At length the village was reached. Douglas was assisted by the girl in finding quarters for the night and she promised to be on hand in the morning to direct them as to the right road.

True to her word Douglas found her in the yard when he had finished his breakfast. The proprietor of the place, a Portuguese, had treated him very well and he was prepared to set out on the day's journey in a more hopeful spirit.

"I wish to thank you for saving me from Muyara," Eliya began as Douglas stood ready to take his place in the cart.

"Don't thank me. It was really a pleasure to punish the scamp."

"I always will remember what you did. I hope I can make some return kindness."

"You have already. We owe our comfort last night to you, and the careful directions you have given me—the little map."

"If you will take me with you to the dividing roads you will then be sure which one you should go."

"I wouldn't put you to all that trouble."

"It is no trouble. I would like, oh, very much."

She was so evidently in earnest, so eager, so anxious, Douglas decided to humor her. It was only a matter of a couple of miles. So it came about that Eliya took her place on the cart beside him as on the previous day and seemed very happy and contented. She pointed out various interesting plants and trees. They passed the overgrown ruin of an ancient temple whose history was lost in the past. Remnants of exquisite carving were still in evidence. Immense faces of Buddha stared expressionless from the stone as though they were defying eternity. At length the division of the roads was reached, the point at which Eliya had proposed to leave.

"It's a long walk back for you," Douglas said.

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I wish I was a man." The words were spoken in not a very manly way, her eyes cast down, the remark quite irrelevant.

"Men are rough creatures. You would have to lose all your prettiness."

She blushed at that, holding her head still lower.

"You won't mind going back alone, will you? You're not afraid?" he asked.

"Do not send me back," she cried. "I am strong; I can work and—and—I can show you the road. I am almost as strong as a man."

The American looked at her slim, youthful figure, her delicately formed hands and feet, and smiled. The idea of adding a young girl to his party he would have regarded as preposterous the day before, but now he hated to refuse her. The three men were grinning. This somehow annoyed him. Why should he not carry her to her home? Without weighing the matter further, perhaps a bit nettled by the men's expressions, he said shortly: "If you wish you may come along."

She sprang forward, seized his hand and kissed it. It was the man's turn to feel embarrassed and then annoyed that he should be so. He peremptorily ordered her to her place on the cart and the journey was resumed.

The girl's delight was not to be hidden. In fact she made no effort to hide it. She told Douglas of her life in Calcutta. He led the talk to her childhood in an endeavor to learn something of Sisowath. She artlessly fell into the trap till the name was mentioned. It reminded her of the purpose of the expedition and her gaiety faded at once.

"Do not go up the mountain," she implored.

"What mountain? Tell me about it."

She covered her face with her hands.

He put his hand on her shoulder. "You promised to help me. What is there about the mountain you are so afraid of?"

She struggled to control her nervousness. "It—it is not very far from our village. It is high. It is barren. No trees grow there. There are great big—oh, very big rocks, and then on top——"

"Go on. What is at the top? He lives there?"

She gave an affirmative shake of the head.

"There is nothing so terrifying about that! What sort of a place is it?"

"Don't go!" she cried, imploringly.

"What is it like?" he persisted.

"It is long—so." She used her hands in describing the place. "Long and high. The roof turns up—so. There is a big stone image——" She was unable to go on.

"Well, that will do." Douglas had gained the necessary information. Whatever it was so terrified Eliya only intensified his interest. The East Indians were notably superstitious. Eliya had been frightened by stories she had heard in her childhood and had not outgrown the early impression.

The general character of the country through which they were now passing was flat and overgrown with reeds and bushes They still caught occasional glimpses of the river, on whose surface boats were seen now and then. When they stopped for the noon-

day meal Eliya's offer to do the cooking was accepted and the result proved entirely satisfactory.

The journey was resumed and the afternoon wore on. It was along toward evening; the road still led through low shrub with an occasional tree, though the growth may have been thicker, when a man stepped out suddenly in front of the oxen and held up his hand, calling in a loud voice an order to halt. He was a big, heavy fellow. Eliya screamed. She recognized Muyara, the robber.

Douglas sprang from the cart, a determined set to his jaw. "How now? You here again?" he demanded.

Muyara's reply was a short, sharp command and a dozen natives came crowding out of the brush. He was not taking any further chances with the American's fists. The band were a rough, half-naked lot, indifferently armed, one or two with spears.

Douglas drew a revolver. "What do you want?" he questioned.

Muyara's men were already advancing, urged on by shouts from their leader. They, too, were shouting and waving their weapons. Douglas and the cook, who was armed with a double-barrel shotgun, opened fire and two of the enemy dropped, but the distance was so short the affair almost at once assumed a hand-to-hand character. To make matters worse, another band of nine or ten came up from the rear. Even then Douglas's splendid trained strength might have turned the tide but for a blow he received on the back of the head. He was down in the midst of a struggling tangle of bodies still fighting, but half stunned as he was the end soon came. He and his three men, with their hands bound behind their backs, were lined up by the cart on which Eliya crouched, wild-eyed.

Muyara stood before his prisoners, his cruel little eyes glinting with triumph, his small, irregular teeth showing in an ugly grin. Douglas could not understand what he said, but it was not hard to guess. He pointed at Eliya and finally seized her by the arm. She struggled to escape him, striking with her small fists and calling down maledictions on his head.

"Why don't you fight me, you coward. Leave the girl alone!" Douglas exclaimed, hot with indignation and anger.

Muyara turned the girl over to two of his followers and then advanced on Douglas. He began some sort of a harangue, waving his fists in front of the face of his prisoner and working himself into a state bordering on frenzy.

"What's he saying?" Douglas asked the cook, who stood next to him.

"He says he will torture you to death for the blows you struck him. He will take you to his boat which is on the river near by."

"I should have put a bullet in him when I had the chance," the American commented.

Muyara was at the height of a recital of the pain he would inflict when the murmuring and movement of his men broke in on his raving. Several had already disappeared into the brush and the two who held Eliya had released her. She too showed great agitation and was so overcome that she sank on her knees groaning, her arm held before her face.

Standing in the road a dozen feet away was a strange-looking man. He might have been carved out of stone so silent and immovable he appeared. Even his brightly glistening eyes were fixed in a stare that was directed at the robber chief. The latter, suddenly conscious of the figure, lost all his bullying eloquence and gradually assumed a rigid position as though he, too, had been turned to stone. His mouth remained half open, his fingers distended.

Douglas, a keenly interested observer of the silent drama, had jumped to the conclusion that the latest arrival on the scene could be none other than Sisowath, the Buddhist savant. His garb vaguely suggested the bonza or priest, but liberties had been taken with it, certain individual touches had been added that baffled Douglas. Whatever the man's calling, his power to hypnotize was being most beautifully demonstrated. His subject had apparently ceased even to breathe.

When our traveler turned from these observations it was to find the last of the half-naked bandits had disappeared. The frozen Muyara stood alone, deserted by his wild, evil-looking band.

The priestly figure now came slowly for-

ward. He said something in a low voice to Eliya and she mechanically rose, came over to Douglas and his three men and proceeded to unfasten the cords that held them. This done she returned to her former position, clearly under the hypnotic power.

"This must surely be Sisowath," Douglas said, half to himself.

"Sisowath. Nomen et omen," came the unexpected reply. The trite Latin phrase sounded out of place.

"I am honored to meet you and also deeply indebted for your timely assistance."

"It was to be. Say no more."

"I have come half around the world that I might hear wisdom from your lips and to witness your power. The latter you have already shown." Douglas waved his hand toward the robber chief, who still remained in his rigid pose.

"You have seen little. This man, burned in the power, would leave only a small part. He has the form of a human, but all else is of the low animal of his transmigration—a wolf. See——" He waved his hand. A deep groan came from the tightened lips of Muyara as his stiff pose, so long held, relaxed. He at once began whining and ended in a series of barks in the precise tones of a wolf. Assuming a crouching posture, he actually trotted along the road in the loping motion of an animal. The transformation was too real, too perfect in its beastly elements to suggest laughter. When he had been hidden by the brush Sisowath turned and released Eliya by another motion of the hand. As she regained her senses her lips paled with fright as she realized her close proximity to the great magician. Her eyes staring with fear, she crept over to Douglas and sank by his feet as though she felt herself in some way protected by him.

"The natives do not understand. Fear blinds their judgment," Sisowath said.

Douglas looked pityingly down on Eliya. "She has been cruelly persecuted by the brutal creature you have just transformed," he said.

"She shall have peace," the magician returned.

There was a slight pause. The American said: "I hope my long journey has not been in vain. Will you grant me an interview?"

"You come from a young—a great nation. Its head will rise above the clouds; its arms will grow in strength till they support the earth. I will give you a demonstration of the hidden power. You shall be notified of the appointed time."

"I am indeed fortunate. May I offer the poor comfort of my cart?"

"I have no need of your cart. Leave me here."

There was a finality to these words that clearly ended the interview. Douglas lifted the girl and placed her on the bullock cart. His men seemed greatly relieved to be on their way. They had the cart in motion at once. Douglas, seated beside the girl, turned to look back, but Sisowath had disappeared.

As the cart creaked along its way the traveler had every cause for self-congratulation. Realizing his good fortune his spirits rose till he was in such good humor that he wasn't even conscious of the swelling on the back of his head where he had been struck during the recent affray.

Eliya touched his arm. "Let me bind up—your head has an unkind bruise. I am so sorry——"

"Well, now you mention it——" He put up his hand. "There is quite a lump, isn't there?"

The first-aid kit was of easy access and when he had selected a phial of liniment and a bandage he accepted her kindly offer. She made no effort to conceal her deep admiration for him and lingered over this personal service as though she were fain to have done, heaving a great sigh when there was no further excuse for continuing, and then knelt behind him, her hands clasped as though she were before a shrine.

No slightest suspicion of the feeling he had roused entered the busy mind of Douglas. His thoughts were all of the anticipated visit to Sisowath. He was like a prospector who has struck gold or a cub reporter with his first "beat." At length he burst into song, his really fine voice echoing among the barren hills they were now traveling among. The men nodded their heads and smiled with pleas-

ure, and as for Eliya, she fairly beamed with delight. Finally the town was reached and, under the guidance of the young girl, a quaint, native hostelry was located and accommodation for the night engaged.

Eliya, leaving them here, departed for her home in a neighboring village which was almost a part of the town. She offered advice about the continuance of their journey and promised to see them again.

The next day Douglas directed his men to glean all the information possible about Sisowath and his abode. With only a slight knowledge of the Indian language he depended almost entirely on what they could gather. Summing up the total of their reports he found his bullock cart would not be available; the road, too, narrow and rough, a swinging footbridge stretched across a brawling torrent, the climb up the side of a rocky mountain, all barring its use. Beyond this nothing was added to Eliya's scant statement.

Two days passed without a word, but on the morning of the third he found, on rising, that a brief message had been left in his room during the night. So eager was he to be on his way that he did not stop to inquire how it came there. It stated that he was to travel alone beyond the swinging bridge and that he would be met at the foot of the mountain.

The day was cloudy and cool. With a duffle-bag strapped to his shoulders in which was packed a sleeping bag, sufficient food for a couple of days and a few personal necessities, he set out in the morning decided on making the pilgrimage alone. It was indeed rough going, though the uneven road hindered him little. Ahead the mountain loomed high and irregular in its outline against the sky. Its steep, barren sides suggested hazardous climbing. Perhaps the pack on his back would be in his way. He had carried it on many a tramping trip at home and found it often an actual necessity. At any rate it could be left at the foot of the mountain if it became burdensome. Reaching the bridge before noon, he stopped to take in the scene, its impressive grandeur too striking to be ignored. The water, tossing in frothy swirls, passed between steep, jagged banks of stone which must have been fractured and hurled about by some mighty earthquake. Beyond the bridge immense sections of granite were piled in wild disorder. Some of these masses must have weighed thousands of tons, and when they had fallen, probably ages before, had assumed such angles and apparently insecure resting places it was a wonder they remained as they were. When he had crossed the bridge he followed a faintly marked pathway that in two instances led under these immense boulders, which formed dark caves where he used a small flashlight to make his way. When he came out of the second cave it was to find himself some distance up the mountain-side. A wild and desolate scene met his eye. Rocks everywhere and little or no vegetation. He could now look down on the titanic boulders and gain a more comprehensive conception of their bulk. While resting here he was startled by a touch on the sleeve. A man stood at his side garbed much as Sisowath had been, the face as devoid of expression as the great stone Buddhas he had passed after leaving Cam Penh and moreover bearing a strong resemblance to them. Toiling on in the wake of the guide he at length reached the top. Not far away he saw the temple with its monolithic idol. Aside from his companion no living creature was anywhere in sight.

At last he stood at the entrance of the temple-like building, at his back the great monolith with its immense face of Buddha stretching far above him. How this towering shaft had been set up was beyond conjecture. It was covered with carving representing battles between men and monkeys and was so placed that the Buddha head faced the east, as did also the high entrance to the building.

The guide now made an obeisance and left him standing. He improved the time in further examination of the building, a fine specimen of Indian architecture. It was also elaborately decorated by minute carving, most of of it of flowery design, but there were grotesque dancers and voluptuous female figures repeated in lines across the front and along the sides. He was not allowed time to carry his investigations further. A deep gong sounded and Sisowath stood on the threshold. He made a sign to Douglas and turned at once without further ceremony. The large apartment could

only have been a small part of the building's interior. It was ingeniously lighted from above. Along the side walls black draperies were hung, a background to a series of pedestals on which were placed exquisite specimens of Chinese ceramic art. These vases varied in height from five to eight feet and were marvels of beauty, their value a fortune. A low altar worked over with the usual carving stood at the farther end of the room, around which the magician passed and stood facing the doorway by which they had entered. When Douglas had approached within a few feet he was directed by a motion of the hand to stop. His whole attention was now focussed on Sisowath, who had begun speaking in an even, measured voice.

"You have made the journey from your country to witness the result of ages of investigation by the wise men of the East. Besides the law of nature we have proved the existence of intelligent forces working for the good or ill of mankind. These forces are in constant pressure one against the other and effect the destiny of the human race. If the control of these forces could be gained sorrow and misery would vanish from the earth. Sickness, age, hate, crime and the many ills of our present life could be eliminated. Universal joy and happiness would reign to the end. It is written in the book of fate that man is to solve these problems. Much has been done; much that you, with your unprepared mind, could not comprehend. My own span of life has been carried far beyond that of the ignorant mass. It is not to tell you of these things that I have permitted you to enter here, but to give you an opportunity to witness the actual existence of these antagonistic forces." He paused and after a short silence clapped his hands. From the two near corners of the room the black draperies were slightly disturbed and two figures advanced, one from either side, bearing bowls of a greenish, dully transparent tint from the mouths of which bright rosy light glowed. When they had come to the low altar before Sisowath the bowls were set down. These two figures were dressed as had been the mountain guide only their shaven heads were not covered by the usual skullcap. Once again Sisowath clapped his hands and the bearers of the bowls left.

"These bowls contain elements of good and ill. That to the right good, this ill," Sisowath resumed. "I will show you how these forces offset each other. See how the light affects my hand." He held it over the "good" vase. It took on the appearance of youth, a perfect, well-formed, normal hand. "Now, observe." He stretched it forth over the "ill" vase and at once the flesh disappeared and only a skeleton remained to be seen, while a strong odor of decayed flesh filled the place.

"These are simple experiments. Now I will show you one of the secrets of life—only one—so simple you will wonder at your ignorance—the ignorance of all mankind but the few who are giving their lives to these vital investigations." He turned to lift the "good" vase, but in doing so his draperies caught around the vessel of "ill," which was drawn to the edge of the altar, and before he could save it it fell to the floor with a loud report. At once the air was filled with the howl and roar of a thousand angry, cursing voices, screams, frightful shrieks, low, animal-like growls, yells of pain and whimpering cries. And then began a deep humming sound like the tone of a stupendous gong or bell, increasing in power till Douglas covered his ears to save his ear-drums from bursting. The sound seemed to be pouring in at the high portal of the room. He turned. Looking in at the door was the great stone face of Buddha that he had seen on the other side of the monolith when he first approached with the guide. It was cracked and broken and chips were falling away from it as he looked. To Douglas the end of the world was at hand. Turning once more toward Sisowath, he found the magician had thrown off his cloak and was trying to cover the broken pieces of the vase; but the garment was torn violently from his hands and was carried up toward the roof, being rent into ragged shreds by unseen hands. Sisowath struggled to rise, but struggled in vain. The glow that had come from the mouth of the vase had turned to an emerald green and seemed to be passing within the magician's body. His face was drawn in ghastly lines of pain. His lips moved, but no sound came and gradually he shrank smaller and smaller till he was no larger than a two months' old babe.

The gong tone now rose to a higher pitch, a singing, quavering tone, and the vases at the farther end of the big hall began to topple, striking the stone pavement to scatter in innumerable pieces. One after another they fell until the last one was destroyed. Then the "good" vase that had stood undisturbed through all this uproar suddenly burst with a loud report and its light was gone. The power to move had deserted Douglas. Of course he was panic-stricken. When he looked again for the magician it was to find him still shrinking at an alarming rate, having been reduced to a struggling, tiny figure no larger than a man's thumb, the light focussing in a small, bright spot on his body. Suddenly it went out and with it the terrible voices, that had continued their hellish bedlam through all, died gradually away as though being drawn through infinite space. The place was now in utter darkness and the American was freed and able to move. There was a smell of smoke; it was hard to breathe. Somehow he attained the entrance and found just room enough to squeeze by the great stone face. Smoke was pouring out of the doorway in billowy clouds.

Douglas, dripping with sweat, grimy with soot, fled toward the mountain-side bent only on escape. He climbed madly over jagged rocks that he would never have attempted at saner moments. Overhead the murky vapor was still whirling and twisting by. He never knew how he accomplished the descent, but by evening he was once more beside the suspension bridge. Too exhausted to go farther, he crawled into the sleeping bag and knew no more.

He awoke to find a cloudy day. Rain was just beginning to sprinkle. Occasional flashes of lightning and low, rumbling thunder warned him to be up and about. Retiring to the first of the caves, he waited till the storm should abate, thankful for the protection and also for the food in his duffle-bag. He thought of Sisowath and the tragic close of a life that meant so much to the human race. He wondered what the result would be of the broken vase of "ill" upon the world; whether the loosening of this force would upset the balance of things. A significant fact was that the world war just then broke out. What had become of the other inmates of the temple? Sisowath had spoken of others who were working on the vital problems with him. They might be able to check the evil influence.

The storm, a violent one, lasted for hours, but finally ceased, though with evidence of more to follow. He crossed the bridge and had begun his weary plodding over the broken road when over a rise ahead three figures came into view. Eliya, leading, was followed by the two Cambodians bearing a litter suspended from a bamboo pole such as is used throughout China. She ran to Douglas and fell on her knees before him, clasping her arms about his body.

"You are still alive!" she cried. "I dreamt it all. I saw you on the mountain—and the black smoke——"

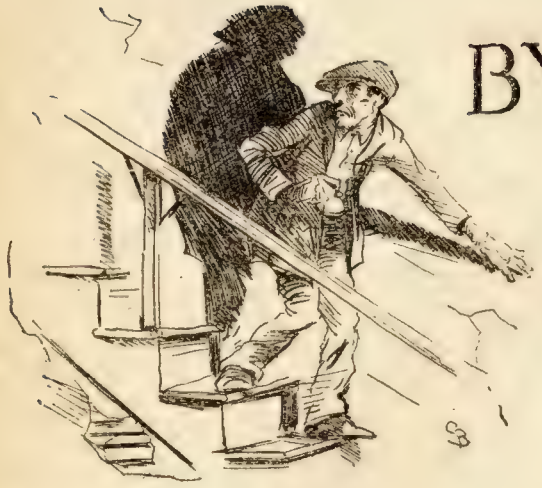
The litter, though not a vital necessity, was welcome enough to the tired man. He took his place in it and so returned to the town.

The weather continued stormy for the next few days and the American's head bothered him a good deal, so he was not averse to the delay. In fact it was the bruised head that kept him from returning to the temple. Now that the thing was over he was ashamed of his panicky flight and was only kept from a second visit by his injury, which had grown more painful. Eliya came to see him each day, bringing dainties and waiting upon him, all of which was duly appreciated.

When at last the time came to say goodby poor Eliya broke down and wept and then ran away and hid herself, ashamed of having shown her feelings.

The return journey was made without adventure. The roads, now familiar, were followed without difficulty. Once again in Saigon the whole adventure had the effect of a wild nightmare on Douglas. Finally the day came for the departure of the steamer. Douglas was about to go on board when a beggar tugged at his coat. Looking down at the cloaked, seated figure he recognized—Sisowath!

But the Hindu absolutely refused to speak of what had happened and Hugh Douglas sailed away wondering if what he had seen was not, after all, induced by his having been hypnotized, too?



BY MUTUAL AGREEMENT

by

Will A. Wilkinson

LIKE a rat from its hole, the King crept down the creaking stairway of the frowzy, dilapidated rooming-house in the heart of one of the city's most dangerous districts; warily, circumspectly, his black, bead-like eyes glittering in the light of a neighboring electric lamp at the mouth of a tunnel-like alley, his head jerking first one way and then the other in furtive glances up and down the narrow and almost deserted street—uninviting from its vary shabbiness—his nervous, hesitating manner resembling for all the world that of a scary rodent ready to scamper back into darkness and safety at the first sign of approaching danger.

In the black shadow of the doorway he loitered, his chin deep-drawn in the upturned collar of his coat, and with cap pulled far down over a face hard and cruel in its cast, seamed by the hand of vice and vicious, unrestrained savagery. Lingering he stood in the gloom of the dingy entryway, eyeing, with furtive, darting glances, each occasional passerby—denizens of the district, mostly—human derelicts, some of them, on the sea of Life, as hard of feature and with souls as dwarfed and twisted as his own, slinking swiftly, silently by, each bent upon his own particular mission. And some, no doubt, were dark and nefarious, and beyond the pale of the law.

As it was, however, there did not seem to be many abroad at this hour. It was past midnight, and a chill mist filled the air, making it disagreeable to be without doors. But the shady resorts and low dives that abounded in the locality were going full blast, and behind drawn shades and closed doors, that were not as a rule difficult to open, crime and corruption flourished in scoffing defiance of the authority of law and order and—decency.

Presently, like a shadow, the fellow slipped from his place of concealment and with quick, gliding stride, noiseless as an evil spirit, hugging closely the unlighted buildings where the shadows were blackest, he hurried down the crooked thoroughfare, head bent low upon his breast, a precaution assumed against the chance scrutiny of any inquisitive plain-clothes man or harness-bull he might happen to meet.

For on this dull, moonless night, with its leaden sky, the King had a mission abroad, as likewise he had had on many nights past—a mission of vengeance, of retaliation; a mission of destruction, aye, of ruthless, wanton murder—did fate perchance but permit the object of his wrath to cross his path.

For days past this wretch had crouched in hiding from the strong arm of the law, cowering, cringing like a wolf in its den, fearful of the coming of day and dreading the glory of

the sun's brightness, creeping out from his lair only at night when the city lay wrapped in a somber mantle.

Ten days previous Detective James Carney had been found with his skull crushed in at the rear of an infamous resort of the neighborhood wherein the King lived and ruled with iron hand his band of evildoers. In fact, it had been the gangster himself who had first stumbled over the prostrate form of the murdered officer during one of his customary nocturnal prowlings, and being prompt to realize the extreme gravity of the situation—for he had openly boasted with reckless bravado, before admiring companions, that some day he would "get" the sleuth because of some grievance growing from his life of lawlessness and ungovernable passions—he fled the spot with fear clutching at his wicked heart; but not before he had been seen and recognized by some one of the more reputable and law-abiding inhabitants of the vicinity. And it was but a short time before the news flashed the rounds that the King had made good his threat to "blot out" his enemy. Carney was dead, and the gangster became a fugitive from justice, wanted by the authorities for the crime, and by Detective Brodigan in particular, with whom the assassinated officer had long been mated in the performance of police duty. Brodigan—cold, relentless, merciless foe of the evildoer; tireless, persevering hound of the law, implacable, tenacious and vengeful. And Brodigan was seeking the King!

But the gunman had dropped from sight; the jackal had fled to its covert, and the square-chinned Nemesis from headquarters, with diligence born of a burning thirst for vengeance and with a consuming desire to be instrumental in heaping coals of a just retribution upon the head of his comrade's murderer, combed the city's "bad lands" with their honeycomb of hidden nooks and obscure crevices, accessible to those coming well recommended and acquainted with the ropes, with a zeal as tireless as it had so far proved vain. And so the days slipped by and Detective Carney's assassin remained still unapprehended.

It was at this particular period that a newcomer appeared in the neighborhood where the King had flourished as ruler: a tender, sweet-faced young girl, as pure and as fair as the wildflowers blooming in the fields whence she came, her sweetness and purity standing out in bold relief against the sordid background of loathsome wickedness that blighted the whole miserable surroundings. And it was with a straightforward simplicity, refreshing with its childish innocence, she made known her quest.

"The King's sister!"

The word sped from lip to lip among the denizens of the underworld; and be it said, there was not one among all the gangster's crime-sodden associates to offer her disrespect or molestation, for their leader had earned the name of being a gunner of uncanny skill and quickness, and a possessor of a heart as cold and steely and grimly merciless as fate itself when aroused to fury. Full well did each evil-minded wretch know that it was but courting the icy embrace of death to so much as hint at insult or injury to this beautiful flower from the verdant hills of the King's boyhood home. But her quest was vain. That brother for whose sake she had in all her girlish innocence entered this seething hotbed of peril and iniquity, where hidden quicksands lay ready to engulf and suck down the artless and unsophisticated, to claim from a life of sin and depraved lawlessness, had scurried to shelter in a distant part of the big city to shun the grasping, outstretched hand of justice reaching, ever reaching, to drag him forth to punishment for the one great capital crime—homicide.

Tongues refused her; none there was to point out to her the whereabouts of that brother—the King. With shifting gaze, they shook their heads and muttered their ignorance; but if pity were not wholly foreign to their warped and corroded souls, then it might not be unreasonable to suspect a spark of compassion lurked in the glance of many a shifty-eyed gangster as he denied her the knowledge she craved.

Known to but a single trusted confederate, the hunted crook had given out word that the location of his refuge was not to be breathed even to the older members of the band. And that word was law.

For days the girl, like a lily in her purity, haunted the low, criminal-infested dens her brother had frequented, her red lips drooping daily with dejection, and her troubled eyes overflowing with entreaty and supplication.

And then one day pretty Mary Ahearn disappeared.

"*The Leech has got her!*"

On the wireless of crookdom the message flashed, and a wave of misgiving and shivering unrest hung over the vile haunts the girl had blessed with the sunshine of her presence.

The *Leech!* — the vulture of the criminal world—the white-slaver—the trafficker in young girls' souls!

Brutal-jawed yeggs and snarling-lipped gangsters cursed beneath their breath, and berated the culprit for his foulness, as they gathered in groups and talked in subdued whispers in the security of the dim-lighted corners of their favorite hangouts.

"The King! He'll sure cook 'im when he finds out!" The prophecy flitted from lip to lip.

With a disregard for the mandate of his chief, the King's lieutenant and closest pal flitted hurriedly away from his accustomed haunts and carried the news to the gang-leader in his hiding-place.

The rage of the man was terrible. his blasphemous oaths of vengeance frightful to hear. Foam-mouthed, he raged and cursed and struck out in blind frenzy and fury; and, in utter extreme, he whined and wept and groveled on the dirty floor from utter exhaustion.

And it was upon that particular night that the King started out—out upon the trail of the Leech, merciless and grim, his black eyes glittering and bloodshot, his heart bursting with blood-lust.

All through the night hours, doggedly, persistently, until the gray streaks of an approaching dawn drove him to shelter, he scoured the rival gangster's district like a restless shade, gliding, creeping with cunning stealth the narrow, squalid streets and black, tunnel-like alleys reeking with filth and hazard, silently, grimly, ever onward, searching, groping, stalking like a beast of prey the human quarry that had by its own foul deed forfeited its right to live. In and out of frowzy joints he flitted, always aloof and shunning the society of the wretches who infested them; for this was the Leech's territory, where his power was felt and where there were many among the hardened criminals who were to be counted as friends and allies of the white-slaver. And, too, there was the necessity of the searcher's practice of caution and cunning for his own individual security, for it shall be remembered that the King himself was a hunted thing, suspected, accused of a punishable crime. Naught must befall him that could in any way serve to thwart the retribution his calloused heart had measured out for the brutish defiler of the innocent sweet-faced Mary. Night after night he took up the case where it had been previously dropped, scurrying to cover when the light of day brought danger to his own self, and when first we glimpse him cowering in the gloom of the shaded doorway he has once more taken up his task.

As he picks his way along the man's shifty, peering eyes are ever on the alert for the first token of danger, and the glimpsing of an approaching police uniform is the signal for a fleeting detour through twisting side streets where the sputtering arc-lights burn farther apart, and where the shadows are thicker and more far-reaching.

At last he has reached the extreme lower part of the city. The buildings are more dingy, more ramshackle, while the general aspect of things is hung with a dismal cheerlessness, uninviting, seemingly menacing, and the silent being slinking by in the shadows caresses a wicked, heavy-calibered automatic in his pocket. For this is the heart of the Leech's stamping-ground, with its crannies of crime and pits of peril. It behooves him to show caution. His night's work has begun in earnest!

The lone figure paused across the street from an evil, booze-selling "soft-drink" saloon, listening to the whine of squeaky fiddles and the discordant honking and rattling of saxophone and drum as the jazz dance on the floor above whooped it up in full blast. Bursts of high, shrill laughter from half-drunken women reached him as he hesitated at the curbing,

mingled with the hoarser tones of men; and the watcher spat out an oath and silently passed upon his way. No need was there to search such surroundings for the object of his quest. The pure-minded Mary would have cringed with terror and loathing at the very sight of such sodden depravity. His search was not ended here. Somewhere else, his heart told him—somewhere in some loathsome den, surrounded by human vultures who prey upon the pure and innocent—he would find her held captive; and, in her defenselessness, menaced by a fate more dreadful than death. And it was such thoughts as these that wrung a groan from the heart of the gunman, spurring him on with grim intent, with a fixedness of purpose, the while lashed by a scourge of fear, torturing apprehension that he would prove too late. His strong, lean fingers wound themselves about the butt of the black gun with a savage intensity that made the joints of his hand snap.

Some of the places he passed were evidently preparing to close for the night, while others, accustomed to scenes of all-night revelry, continued in full swing their noisy carousals. Scrubby little moving picture houses with lurid, blood-and-thunder lithographs, and here and there a "smut" theater playing the lowest burlesque sketches, were turning out their night audiences, while the fifth-rate cabarets, with their floods of bright light, and their pitifully cheap tinsel, were brushing up in anticipation of an increase of patronage.

Suddenly, with a whistling intake of breath, the King jerked himself to an abrupt halt and melted quickly into the dark shadows afforded by a tottering billboard that graced the front of a vacant, weed-grown lot.

Out from a tiny, dingy office whose crudely lettered sign proclaimed it to be the home of a taxi company offering an all-night service, there stepped the bulky, broad-shouldered figure of a man, followed by a younger individual in a soiled uniform of a public chauffeur.

"Brodigan!" growled the watcher ensconced back of the billboard. "The d—l!"

"Here she is, boss," the younger man sang out as the two paused beside a motor vehicle of rather uncertain age drawn up to the curbstone in front; "and she's workin' O. K., mister. We had 'er completely overhauled a day or so ago, you know."

"All right, son, all right. I'll give her a try-out," grunted the officer, clambering heavily in behind the steering-wheel and setting the starter in action. "See you later."

"Say, what do you know 'bout that, Jack!" called out the chauffeur to a companion driver who lolled back on the cushions of another cab, idly pulling at a cigarette.

"Who was that guy?" inquired the other, watching through the lifting fog the tail-light of the cab disappearing down the black street.

"Some dick, I reckon. He talked the boss into lettin' him use my boat to make a call I had for one-thirty down on Linard street. Reckon he's after some one pretty hot."

"Hop in, an' we'll follow along," suggested the other.

"Aw, no; what's the use? Ain't nothin' exciting seein' a bull make a pinch. Besides, the boss 'd raise Cain if we both sneaked away like that; and I need this job of mine for a month or two yet."

The gangster, crouching in the shadows, drank in every word.

"Wonder what that ol' flat-foot's up to, anyhow?" he mused. "That was ol' Brodigan, all right, all right! No mistake there! But what's th' auto-drivin' stunt all about?"

There was more need of caution than ever now that he possessed knowledge of his old enemy's presence in the immediate locality.

"Linard street," he muttered. "That ain't far from here—down by the railroad yards. Mostly nigger dumps down along there."

Almost unconsciously his steps led him to the lower end of the street where the stores and other places of business were fewer; where the pavement was rougher and much in need of repair; where hugh brick warehouses reared their blank walls in the air; where squalid shacks squatted like great toads in the darkness, and where everything seemed to shout of roughness and poverty and squalor—this was Linard street, on the edge of the black belt—"Little Africa." Coughing and wheezing switch-engines jangled and bumped their way about in the near-by freight yards, while bright lanterns, like huge fire-

flies, danced and flitted about in the hands of the switching crews making up their trains. The choking fumes of coal gas hung over all.

The King scurried across the street and paused in the shadows cast by a long line of truck wagons arranged before the barns of a transfer firm. Occasionally he could catch the thudding stamp of some restless horse in its stall, and farther off the long-drawn wail of a freight engine just pulling into the yards; the rumble of a late trolley car sounded, grinding its way across a nearby viaduct. There were these and countless other strange night noises—eerie, mysterious—on all sides.

And as he stood, suddenly his body became iron-rigid, his head cocked to one side, his hearing strained to catch the note of some new, some less distinct sound, that assailed his ear. Tense and motionless he listened, and once again his quick ear caught it. From somewhere down that silent, gloomy street, just how far he could not at first determine, peculiar sounds were wafted to him on the night breezes, sounds that resembled nothing in the world so much as little choking sobs or half-stifled moans.

Out in the gloom and fog the gangster started, alert and crouching; and as he peered it was not long before his sharp eyes sighted the presence of an object down the street moving toward him. And as it grew nearer it took on shape and developed into a human form—a slight form, he distinguished, probably that of a youth. Straight toward his place of concealment it came, and while it moved rapidly there seemed to be a wavering uncertainty to the gait.

The King flattened closer against a huge van and waited, the black-barreled gun clutched tightly in one fist, for the man had no intentions of being taken by surprise did trouble threaten; and at last, when the figure was but a few yards distant, and the terror-induced whimpering plainly audible, an exclamation of surprise escaped the gangster's lips.

"Hell! *That's a woman!*"

Again the half-sobbed moan assailed his ear and the newcomer paused as if from exhaustion.

"What's the trouble, lady?"

The man stepped from his hiding place.

"Come, come; there ain't no need o' gettin' scared. I won't hurt you none."

The girl, for she was but a slip of a thing, started back with a weak little cry of alarm at the unexpectedness of his appearance, and turned as if to continue her flight; but something there must have been in the roughly kind tones of the gunman to assure her and lend strength to her courage, for after a moment's hesitation she pressed up to him and stood directly in his path.

"Oh, sir, whoever you may be," she gasped, her breath coming in choppy jerks, "it has been awful—*awful!* Oh, I shall never forget that terrible place and that dreadful black woman and—*him!* And, oh, sir, there is murder going on back there—a brave man who helped me escape is down there battling against odds for his very life! Can't you—won't you do something?"

The King slipped his pocket-flash from his clothes and swept the face, pale and stamped with panicky terror, with the bright rays, and as the dark eyes, distended with lingering horror, looked up into his, the man of the underworld staggered back with a choking rattle in his throat.

"Good God — Mary!" he croaked. "Tell me, *is it you?*"

He permitted the light from the flash to fall full upon his own evil features so that the girl might see, and when she glimpsed the face before her, painted with crime and depravity though it was, she gave utterance to a glad little cry and threw herself upon him and cuddled her head against his rough, damp coat.

"Bob! Bob!" she crooned. "Have I found you at last? My Bob!" And there in the blackness of their sinister surroundings they pressed in loving embrace—the hard-eyed, vicious animal of the underworld with his warped and twisted soul, calloused and blackened by years of crime, and the tender, loving creature—saintly and virtuous—the personification of purity and goodness.

Suddenly she withdrew from his arms.

"But oh, Bob, in our gladness we must not forget! Down there in that terrible place a man is battling for his existence—*and he aided me!* The beast they called the Leech, and the

black woman, who was almost as terrible, have murder in their hearts! Isn't there something we can do?"

The man stood silent for a moment before he answered.

"Mary," he said at last, "shall you be afraid to stay alone for a short while? I'll leave my pistol with you. You used to be pretty clever with your little .22 back home there; and if any one offers to molest you, let 'em have all there is in the clip—and it's full up. I won't be gone long. I'm off to see what's doin' in th' crib yonder."

The urging voice of the girl followed him as he slipped away into the blackness.

The man raced toward the squalid, tumbledown shack that crouched beside a huge brick warehouse. A lone motor car stood at the curbing, unoccupied and with lights extinguished. There was no sign of illumination to be seen about the house, and the King crept closer to listen. From within came the sounds of a wild hubbub, a terrific struggle, going on—dull thuds and the crashing of overturned furniture, accompanied by hoarse exclamations and foul oaths. The front door hung wide upon its hinges, leaving the entrance to a tiny hallway yawning like the black mouth of a cave. With a cautious step, the gangster tiptoed into its narrow confines, his pocket-lantern playing queerly upon the cracked walls with their patches of missing plaster where the lath grinned through, gaining, in those few fleeting seconds, his bearings and locating the room where the tumult raged.

"I've got him! I've got him!" panted a coarse voice triumphantly. "Slip me th' knife, Bess—slip me th' knife, you black fool, and I'll finish th' blasted dick!"

Again the gangster's flash came into play and its bright ray rested upon the struggling men on the floor, and, by chance, full upon the face of the fallen one. The man's teeth clicked as he peered, while his breath came quickly as in that fleeting instant he looked full into the face of Detective Brodigan, noting, as he did so, the agonized desperation stamped upon the exhausted officer's countenance. Swerving the light slightly, the gloating face of the other, grinning with a triumph, wicked and unholy, was brought into view. A savage growl rumbled from the gangster's throat. The *Leech!*—the man upon whom he had sworn to wreak a terrible vengeance — there before him! His tongue licked his dry lips.

The white-slaver was crouched upon the body of the fallen detective, his knee crushed cruelly against the stomach, while a claw-like hand gripped with savage tenacity his helpless victim's throat. And then into the ribbon of light another object was thrust—a big, black paw, plump and cushiony, its fingers wound about the hilt of a slender, gleaming dagger. The free hand of the exulting Leech darted out and met the black one, and the watcher in the doorway saw the knife exchanged.

What luck was this! The corrupt heart of the gang leader pounded within his breast as he stood fascinated by the scene before him, and the realization filtered through his wicked brain that in a few short seconds he would be forever rid of a hated enemy, and that by the hand of another! Why should he interfere? Officer Brodigan was bent upon landing him for a crime he had not committed and the detective's success meant only that he would be railroaded to the electric chair! With Brodigan gone, the King would see to it that the white-slaver should never escape.

But upon top of all these evil thoughts there came the memory of a gentle voice, the voice of a sweet-faced girl, whispering into his ear out there in the dark shadows: *"And he aided me!"*

With a growled oath, the gangster's sinewy limbs landed him with a panther-like spring into the center of the room, the while his right arm lashed out and a brass-knuckled fist crunched against the face of the almost victorious Leech. And with a groan the white-slaver rolled over upon the floor and lay still.

"Quick! Lights up, there!" barked the hard voice of the newcomer as he threw the blinding glare of his torch full into the face of the now terrified negress. "Come, you black she-devil! Move lively, or I'll plug your fat carcass! Notion t' let you have a couple, anyway!"

His bluff worked admirably, for be it remembered his pistol remained with the girl outside.

"Fo' de Lord, mister, doan harm po' ol' Bessie!" whimpered the wench, almost paralyzed with terror at the sudden and unexpected turn of events. "She'll git de light fo' you, Bessie will!"

"Hump yourself, then, before I lose my temper. You're a plumb goner if I do."

With the glow of the kerosene lamp once more illuminating the room, the King gazed about upon the scene of destruction. But few of the mean furnishings of the place had escaped being overturned and broken, and the confusion on all sides gave mute but eloquent testimony of the ferocity of the battle that had raged.

On the floor, sprawled on his back and unconscious, lay the bleeding-faced Leech, while near by, panting and blowing, sat the blocky figure of Detective Brodigan, dazed and bewildered.

"Whew! S-s-some scrap, what!" he puffed, his thick chest rising and falling with the protestations of his outraged lungs. "Some doings! Hello——" He broke off as he secured a better look at the man before him. "You—you—Ahearn? The King?"

"Yes, Brodigan, it's me," returned the gangster in a tone of sullen defiance. "Better slip the links on that bird's wrists 'fore he comes to." The man stooped and picked up a heavy police-service pistol from the floor.

"That's my gun," hastily explained the officer. "Got away from me in the rumpus when that fellow waded into me after the wench had doused the light."

"That's all right; I'll take care of it for you for a while," was the grim response. "Got him cuffed up all right, have you? Well, get th' curtain-cord and tie up the nigger, Brodigan."

"That ain't a bad idea, either. I'll want her, too, come to think about it. She's the black devil that got me in bad. But I've got that bird where I want him, thanks to you, Ahearn. How'd it come you happened along 'ust when you did? You sure saved my bacon for me, I'll say! I've been on the lookout for that cur for some little time past, but somehow I didn't seem just able to connect up with him. But he's my meat now, blast him! I got a tip, no matter where or how, that he was lying low in this end of town, and that he had a call placed for a taxi at this address to-night; so I figured that by working in the role of chauffeur I could get close to him quicker and safer. I fixed it up with the owner of the cab, and made the drive, and when the wench met me at the door she piloted me inside, explaining that I was wanted to assist in carrying a heavy bundle to the car. I got the drop on the Leech right off the bat, and I wasn't long in finding out that the bundle I was expected to carry was a pretty young girl who declared she was being held a captive by the pair. Her unlooked-for presence in the dump sort of upset me, and flabbergasted me to the extent that I was a bit slow in grasping the how of things. She begged me to protect her and take her away from the place, which I sure promised to do; and it was while my attention was divided between her and the Leech that this black hag slipped around behind and flicked out the light. After that me and him went to it hot and heavy in the dark. I called to the girl to beat it, and I guess she succeeded in making a getaway all right. I wonder is she safe somewhere?"

"Yes; thanks to you, sir," came a faltering voice from the doorway. "Oh, Bob," cried the girl, "I couldn't stay out there alone in the dark any longer! I—I was afraid; even with your pistol to protect me!"

Brodigan's jaw sagged and he gazed from the girl to the gangster with a puzzled look written upon his face.

"Bob?" he queried. "What is all this, anyhow? Who is she? Where'd you ever see the girl before, Ahearn?"

The gunman glided across to the officer's side, the detective's own weapon leveled at the latter's breast.

"Brodigan," the man's voice was low and hard, "that little woman there is—my sister. I'm going to take her away from here tonight; going to take her back to the home she should never have left. Understand? *I'm* going to take her! And that calls for only one thing, Brodigan. You stay here. I'll take a few twists around your wrists and ankles with the rope, and throw the lock on the door as I go out. In an hour or so, after I've got

a good start, I'll get word to your chief, somehow, and I guess he will look after you all right. Up with your hands, now, and no monkey business!" And the black muzzle of the gat was jabbed sharply against the officer's ribs.

"But, say! Hold on a minute! What's the big idea? I don't just get the drift of things, Ahearn." And Brodigan's fat face held a blank look.

"Well, listen and I'll wise you up: When you put up a battle to-night to save that kid, Brodigan, you sure had me owin' you heavy. Maybe some folks in my place would claim as how th' debt was canceled when I laid out that skunk there just as he was about to bump you off with the knife. But *I* don't! I'm still owin' you a lot. I was lookin' for th' dirty rat myself to croak 'im. I knowed he had th' girl, blast 'im, and that he figured on doing with her just as he has done with many a one before, and I guess to-night was the night he had chosen to move her up to one of them dumps farther uptown, in the red-light district. I had it all doped out to puncture my moniker in his hide with my gat whenever I came up with 'im, but your being on the spot right at present sort o' puts th' kibosh on my plans. Outside o' scarin' th' kid almost t' death, th' damned cur hain't harmed her none as yet, I understand, so maybe it would be better t' turn 'im over t' you. But listen, Brodigan! You ain't a-goin' t' take me! Not yet!"

"Don't you worry none about that bird not getting his, Ahearn! It's the hot chair for that baby—surest thing *you* ever knew!"

"Th'—*chair?*"

"I said it, King—the chair!" and the old police hound's gray eyes took on a cold, steely look. "You remember poor old Jimmy Carney? That's the blasted whelp that bumped him off! I was sweating Kid Sly for a loft robbery a few days ago, and the Kid, being all in for the want of his favorite snow, caved and came across with the whole story. He and the Leech were prowling about, Ahearn, for some reason or other, down in the neighborhood where you hang out, Ahearn, and that night they was hard at work rolling a poor helpless souse in the alley back of Fat Flynn's joint when Carney came upon them unexpected like. It—it was then the damned Leech soaked poor Jim without giving him a chance for his life! But he'll get his—he'll get his! Believe me!"

The gangster's gaze fixed full upon the officer.

"Are you—are you on the square, Brodigan, about this?"

"That's on the level—yes!"

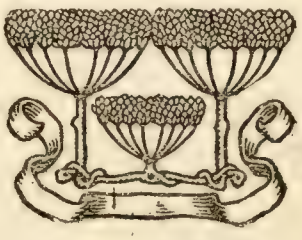
"But—but I—I thought you was lookin' for—for——"

"You? Eh, Ahearn? Thought I wanted you for that killing? At first I did; later—no. And if I had a-wanted you very bad the last week or so I could have laid hands on you, kid. Maybe it'll ruffle your pride some, my lad, but I'll say I was wise to your hide-out up in Sandlovitch's rookery two or three days before you first lit there. I've got nothing against you—now. Go straight, boy, and you won't ever be bothered by me again."

Without a word the gunman extended the detective's weapon toward him. The officer accepted it, and then held out a big, fat paw.

"I'll sure be some old man when I forget the good turn you did me this night, Ahearn! It was the narrowest squeak *I* ever had!"

"Can that stuff, Brodigan; you're the guy what's got all th' thanks comin' his way. But if you sure feel that way about it, maybe we'd both better wipe off th' slate clean an' let 'er go at that. Good-by. Come, Mary," and there was a catch in the man's throat as he turned toward the wondering, wide-eyed girl watching from the threshold; "to-morrow you an' me are goin'—home!"



The Invisible Hand

By ROSEWELL G. LOWREY

O'LACY GORDON, house detective at the Hotel Clairess, slouched in his chair with apparent indolence. Mentally he catalogued the attributes of the man who was speaking to a group of men near by. A little above medium height, with a neatly trimmed gray Vandyke beard, gray eyes behind horn-rimmed spectacles, and the whole set off by a dapper gray lounge suit, the speaker had the face and air of a savant.

The story which he was relating to his fellow travelers was well known to the listening detective. A few years ago it had been well known to the world. At times, as the speaker's voice rose and fell, it was scarcely audible from the detective's chair. The words which had bridged the chasm of space and rippled Gordon's stream of consciousness had been these:

"It was six years ago, in room 324."

The house detective knew instantly that the gray stranger was telling his companions of the first crime which had spotted the record of the Hotel Clairess. It had been a murder, followed by a robbery.

"Odd," thought Gordon, "that a casual transient should remember the room number."

In another minute his attention would have wandered, all suspicion silenced, but the narrator made the mistake of saying:

"The murderer had trouble in stripping a diamond solitaire from the woman's finger. In his haste he tore the flesh a little."

Then he went on with the story as it was known by the general public.

The detective repressed an impulse to sit bolt upright and stare at the speaker. Well Gordon remembered that scratch. From it a stain of blood had run down across the back of the murdered woman's hand and in the blood had been a single fingerprint. But these facts had not been given to the newspapers or to the world.

The detective, under cover of assumed indifference, turned his mild, sleepy blue eyes upon the speaker. It was then that he began a careful inventory which brought him to a conclusion about the man in gray.

"Intelligent. Dangerous. This man knows too much about the crime. How did he learn about the scratch? How did he know the circumstances in which it had been given? If he knew these things why did he not also know about the fingerprint, and tell about it? Did the murderer know he had left that fingerprint?"

But the story-teller had not finished. He went on to add something else that was new to Gordon; something which the detective felt sure had never been told before, because it was a baseless fabrication.

"There were strange tales afloat at the time of the murder," said the man in gray. "On account of them some of the negro servants had quit the hotel. Superstitious guests from time to time took to flight. It was reported by the superstitious darkies that the ringless hand still wandered here and there about the Clairess, in search of the rings it had lost. It had searched through jewel cases in a quest for the missing rings, but always after taking a ring it discovered its mistake and resumed its search. To most eyes it was invisible, though there were some colored people who said that they had seen it, blood still staining the lacerated finger. But that," he added, "is not to be credited by such intelligent people as we."

The gentleman's auditors nodded. A listening girl, daughter of a banker from Duluth, pulled herself together with somewhat of an effort.

"Oh, no, of course not!" She made an attempt to laugh, but stopped short. "Dad, can't we go to our rooms? I am so tired." Then she added to the man who was speak-

ing about the old-time murder mystery: "You will excuse us, Doctor Ridson, I am sure."

From his place on the mezzanine floor the detective had an excellent view of the lobby and the desk. He watched the banker and his daughter ask for their key, and enter the elevator. After a few minutes Dr. Ridson followed them. It was not till then that Gordon went to the desk himself. He located Ridson easily. The man's signature was written in a large hand, with many flourishes—"Richard Ridson, Chicago." The room number was 902.

Gordon called the clerk.

"Bob, why did you put Doctor Ridson in room 902?"

"He asked for it, sir. He said he had been there before, and liked the way the windows were arranged."

The next hour the detective spent in searching through old records. No Dr. Ridson had ever been a guest of the hotel before. He remembered that room 902 had been occupied by a Dr. Roy Reddock of Nashville on the night of the murder. Gordon was not even sure that there was the slightest similarity in the formation of the letters of the two signatures in the hotel registers, though six years ago his suspicion had been directed toward Dr. Reddock.

He spoke to the clerk again:

"Any one in 904?"

"No, sir," respectfully.

"Then leave it open. I'll stay there to-night."

In the basement he found the electrician, a huge fellow in faded overalls, bending over a fan motor with a big screwdriver.

"Joe," said Gordon, "you remember the flashlight alarm we worked out for the Batson case? I want you to connect it to-night so that it will flash in 904 when the door of 902 is opened. The man has already gone up. Give him an hour, in case he wants to go to sleep. Then be careful to make no noise that can be heard inside his room."

There was a gleam of friendly admiration mixed with curiosity in the honest brown eyes of the electrician as they followed Gordon's lank figure from his feet up to his mask-like face. But the electrician asked no questions, showing his understanding of the situation simply by a nod before he resumed his work.

O'Lacy Gordon went next toward the street. From the opposite curb he scanned the towering gray walls of the hostelry, broken here and there with squares of light in the gathering dusk. He located the window of 902 easily. It was so placed that there was no other window either directly below or directly above it. Gordon knew that on the fifth and eighth floors a narrow ledge of bricks ran entirely around the outside of the building, just flush with the window sills. But the walls near Dr. Ridson's window, nine stories up, were as smooth as a freshly shaved chin. No human being could cling to the narrow ledges. Gordon was glad that his man was on the ninth floor.

The house detective did not take off his clothes that night. Perhaps the mask-like face and the faded eyes did not hide an unusual intelligence. That may be the reason their owner had never risen above his original position. But he knew his work. Painstaking he was, and diligent; and these attributes had given him a fair degree of success.

He believed that now had come his great opportunity. The master crook who had committed the hotel's first crime was, he suspected, in the house again. Its mystery, which had remained unsolved, was the only blot upon Gordon's record. He feared that in Ridson he was fighting a wonderful mind combined with a treacherous soul. He was taking no chances.

So he sat from eleven o'clock till dawn, his short black gun cuddled in his huge, gnarled hand, and facing the little alarm bulb on the wall in 904. No sound came from the adjoining room. The bulb on the wall remained dead. Finally, when the sunlight began to creep along the window and lay a yellow finger across the floor, he stretched himself upon the bed and slept. Defeated he was for the present, but he knew in his heart that the end was not yet.

At eight o'clock he was roused by the buzzing of the telephone. At the instrument the voice of Steve, the day clerk, sounded in his ear.

"Is that you, O'Lacy? Here is a job for

you. Mrs. Walcot Dorfson, in 808, reports that two rings were taken from her room last night. One of them was a diamond which she values at twelve hundred. The other was practically worthless. They were on her dressing table, she says, with a pearl necklace and some small change. Only the rings were disturbed. Sounds fishy to me."

"I'll be right down, Steve. Thank you."

As the receiver clicked on its hook the little bulb on the wall began to glow. Ridson was leaving his room for the first time since he had gone up from the lobby the evening before.

The two men, officer and suspected criminal, found themselves going down together in the same car. The tall, sombre young passenger seemed to warm a little toward his dignified but cheerful and nattily dressed old companion. One might have thought that he was lonely, that he craved companionship. At any rate he attempted conversation.

"Did you hear about the robbery last night?"

"No," said Dr. Ridson genially. "What robbery?"

"Why, the woman in 808 claims to have lost a twelve-hundred-dollar ring." Gordon threw a suggestion of knowing disbelief into his tone.

The smaller man raised his eyebrows slightly.

"The invisible hand," he said and smiled.

By noon the hotel was seething with the tale of the invisible hand and the missing rings. The manager sent for Gordon. When the detective entered his office he found the other pacing the floor — a short, fat man, slightly overdressed, with bushy eyebrows and an explosive manner.

"O'Lacy," he said, "it's up to you to stop these ghost stories about the rings. What are you doing?"

The detective grinned.

"I have a theory."

Gibson resumed his pacing. "If you do not clear it up pretty soon business will be shot to blazes," and the interview was closed.

That evening at dinner was forged the first link in the chain of evidence. Gordon went into the dining-room a few minutes after Dr. Ridson, and took a table where he could observe the actions of the man he called a master crook. The doctor ordered a banana, and when it came he dropped it into his pocket.

The day passed and night fell again.

Through the lonely hours of his vigil in 904 that night the thought kept running through the detective's head: "A banana! Why a banana?"

It was almost three o'clock in the morning when Mrs. Adam Crabtree, in room 800, waked with a start. Her sleep had been light and fitful, for the evening before she had listened while a banker's daughter from Duluth had told her the story of the invisible hand. After that she had attempted to persuade her husband to change to another hotel, but he had been adamant.

"No, we won't," he said. "We stay right here!" and that had ended it, for Adam ruled his house.

Mrs. Crabtree lay now with staring eyes. Upon her ears fell two sounds. One of them she hardly heard; through long years of married life she had become hardened to the stentorian snore of her husband. But the other sound was faint, elusive, like the fall of ghostly feet upon the floor, the rustle of ghostly robes. Upon it she strained to fasten her hearing with her whole soul. It seemed to be coming from the window, nearer, nearer.

She dared not scream; but she could endure the situation no longer. Vigorously she pushed Mr. Crabtree with her foot, and as he rolled over his eyes, too, came open, but reluctantly.

"What you want, Rachel?" he grumbled.

"Listen!"

"I don't hear nothing."

"Listen, I say! There it is!"

Her lord and master was on the verge of a withering remark calculated to silence her for the night when there was a sudden, unmistakable thud from the direction of the dresser. This was followed a moment later by a sharp, metallic sound and another thud. His wife clung to him desperately, but he pushed her away and half stumbled to his feet. He groped along the wall for what seemed an eternity before he found the light switch and flooded the room with brilliance. The place

was empty. Everything was in order as they had left it. But his wife was sitting up in bed, her face white with horror.

"O-oh! Did you see it?"

"See what?"

"The hand. It went out the window when you turned on the light."

Adam laughed, but without conviction. He was sure that the door had remained closed. They were eight stories above the ground, and the walls outside the room offered no foothold for a man. He looked at the dresser. Three rings were missing. Two of them belonged to his wife. The other was a small empty key-ring which had belonged to him. Three rings were missing. Two of them belonged to his wife. The other was a small empty key-ring which had belonged to him.

"Look here, Mrs. Crabtree," said the latter, "Mr. Gordon will do his best to recover your rings for you. But the part about seeing the invisible hand is foolish. If it were invisible how could you see it? You must not go around telling that to people in this hotel. You saw nothing. It was your overwrought imagination."

"I am sure she saw something, right enough," said Gordon, "but it was not a hand."

During the day the detective gathered one more seemingly unimportant and disconnected bit of information from the boy who had conducted Dr. Ridson to his room. In the doctor's luggage had been a shiny black suitcase which he had insisted upon carrying himself. It had the appearance of having been subjected to high-power rifle fire, for there were a number of neat, round holes through the lid.

That night O'Lacy Gordon did not stay at the Hotel Clairess. He said nothing to any one about where he was going. Manager Gibson was nervous in his absence, and angry at his departure at such a time without an explanation. He spent most of the night behind the desk in the lobby, moving uneasily about, and expecting a burglar alarm at any moment from some room in the vast caravansary.

Shortly after two o'clock Gordon came in from the street. The manager of the Hotel Clairess rushed forward to meet him.

"This is a fine mess!" he snorted. "Where the devil——"

"I have your man," said Gordon. "We won't disturb the hotel guests by going after him now, but there will be a couple of cops here at seven in the morning to help make the arrest."

And that was the only information the manager got.

When the zero hour arrived, the two policemen, the manager and O'Lacy Gordon loaded into an elevator and went to the ninth floor. There Gordon issued his orders.

"It is Doctor Ridson, in room 902," he said "He will put up a fight if he has the chance. You men wait in the corridor with Mr. Gibson, so he will not catch a glimpse of your uniforms to put him on his guard. Perhaps I can get the drop on him. If he gets by me, you can stop him. He is also wanted for murder."

It was just ten minutes past seven when the pass-key turned in the lock at number 902, and Gordon entered the room, pistol in hand. Dr. Ridson, though fully dressed, had been unaware how to take the intrusion. He was caught fairly, though a gun lay on the table near him. But it was not the gun which first caught the eyes of the detective. There was also a small, flat wicker basket, and beside it a neat coil of silk cord. Sitting on his haunches in the basket, a piece of banana between his front paws, was a small, wise-looking gray monkey.

"You are under arrest," said Gordon. A glint of humor flickered in his eyes. "Both of you," he added with a glance toward the monkey.

Dr. Ridson seemed thoroughly at ease.

"For what?" he asked.

"For stealing rings. I have you right enough. I watched you last night from the window in that office building across the street."

Had Gordon stopped there, all might have been well. But it was his hour of triumph. He wished to enjoy it to the full. He wished to show his opponent how completely the

game was lost, how thoroughly he had been outplayed.

"If you had kept quiet about that murder you committed here six years ago, and left off your fool ghost stories, you might have got away with this ring trick. It was clever enough."

Ridson had straightened himself, and was backing away.

"So you know about the murder," he said softly, as if addressing no one. "My first and last, and it got me." He was moving toward the window.

Gordon stepped forward quickly, his gun raised.

"No you don't!" he said.

Dr. Ridson stopped, a few feet from his goal. Gordon was now abreast of the table.

"Mr. Detective," said the prisoner with a mock flourish, "let me introduce you to Bolivar. He is the gentleman there on the table: my friend, companion and adviser."

At the sound of his name Bolivar dropped his banana, climbed out of the basket and ran forward to that edge of the table which was nearest to Gordon. The two policemen had now crowded into the room, followed at a respectful distance by Mr. Gibson. But they had returned their guns to their holsters. One of them produced handcuffs. Suddenly Dr. Ridson gave a quick, sharp whistle.

At the sound Bolivar sprang like a catapult straight upon Gordon's gun-hand. He planted his teeth in the wrist of the detective. With a cry, Gordon dashed him to the floor. But it was too late. The prisoner had turned and dived head foremost from the window. After what seemed an eternity the sound of a heavy body striking came up from the pavement nine floors below to the little group of men who stood huddled in the gay hotel room.

That evening, as a final blow to the myth of the invisible hand, Gordon staged a show in the hotel. There was a balustrade which separated the lobby from the writing-room. It ran directly under the edge of the balcony. On the main floor near this balustrade a small dressing-table was placed. It was covered with an assortment of odds and ends, buttons, pins, money and a few rings. Gordon stood with Bolivar on the mezzanine floor. At a given signal he placed the monkey in the basket which had been taken from the room of Dr. Ridson. Then by means of the silk cord he lowered the basket till it hung against the lower railing. Without hesitation Bolivar climbed onto the railing and took himself daintily along for a distance of about twenty feet. Then he sighted the dressing-table and leaped to the floor. Here his mode of advancement was peculiar, consisting of a series of short, almost noiseless hops. Upon reaching the dressing-table he nosed about for a moment and selected a ring. With this he returned to the basket and waited to be drawn up.

PEARLS IN PLANTS

FEW people realize that there are such things as vegetable pearls. Yet, now and again, in certain tropical plants curious hard round substances are found which one may properly call pearls, seeing that their composition is almost identical with the product of the oyster. For instance, occasionally in Java these substances are discovered in the joints of bamboos. On analysis the bodies are found to consist of almost pure carbonate of lime—the same substance which goes to the make-up of the pearl of the oyster. Now and again similar bodies are found in the endosperm of the cocoanut while these plant pearls are known to occur in the wood of the pomegranate and teak trees. These vegetable pearls are sometimes as large as a hazel nut although as a rule they are somewhat smaller. Exactly how the vegetable pearls arise is not fully known. They are generally believed to be due to an excess of calcareous and silicious matter in the plant. The plant pearls are rarely seen apart from the East Indian islands, for they are highly valued as charms. The owner will not part with one for any figure seeing that as long as he holds the pearl he considers that he will be immune from all ills which commonly assail mankind.

The Clue On Canvas

By LEILA BRECHENSER-ROSTISER

IT was a very chilly night when Don Wellington and I happened in at the club. We found several of our friends in one corner lingering over their after-dinner coffee.

Nelson Danmark, a comparatively unknown artist, was discussing the recent exhibition at the academy with Margaret Laird, who wrote stories, while Jim McDonald, an old-time editor, sat by in silence contentedly blowing rings of smoke into space.

Later, the artist, Rudy Koenig—Rudolph Frederick Koenig, I should say—joined our little party. Personally, I disliked the man, for although young, handsome and brilliant, a brief student-year in the French capital had left him imbued with a pessimistic philosophy which I could not endure.

"I say, Don," he began, addressing my fellow-worker on *The Rising Sun,* "you writers ought to blush for the stuff you're turning out. That last story of yours was exceptionally rotten.

"You mean Don's 'Lady Foley?'" I asked.

"That's the story. Really it is amusing how you writer-folk work up incidents with plausible settings, motives and language and then palm them off as true pictures of life," he sneered. "I do believe all the good tales *have* been written."

"I don't know about that," interrupted Margaret Laird rather haughtily. "Anyway, Don seems as popular as ever with the big magazines, so why should he worry?"

"Sorry that I can't agree with you," Don Wellington told Koenig good-naturedly. "I think the average writer is doing his level best to give well-written, concise word-pictures — and because of their very truthfulness they can not fail in interest."

Rudolph Koenig smiled cynically as Don continued:

"Only last week I finished a story that began over a year ago. It is a fascinating narrative and it interested me from the very beginning. Now that it is finished, I can truthfully say that without different settings or additional trimmings, it makes a fine magazine story. If it won't bore the others, I'd like to tell it to you, though I hardly hope to convince you even by so truthful an example."

"Go ahead," said Jim McDonald, and the rest of us gave a general nod of encouragement. So, after all had comfortably settled themselves, Don Wellington began his story.

"Two years ago I left a Chicago paper to take up my duties on *The Rising Sun.* The first autumn of my life in New York, I noticed a queer-looking fellow who seemed to be always hurrying down Fifth avenue about the time that I walked to my rooms from the office. He appeared so regularly that I came to watch for him, and as time went on my curiosity deepened.

"He was distinctly a foreigner—a Frenchman—and he was always alone. As he walked through the crowd his tall, thin body slightly bent forward, his restless eyes roved from face to face. Something about him—perhaps the pallor of his skin, intensified by the closely-trimmed French beard, or the unchangeable melancholy of his expression — aroused my interest.

"At last I made up my mind to follow him, thinking that something might turn up to lead to an acquaintance with the tall, gaunt stranger, so one evening I followed him down the avenue.

"His gait was fast, but I kept close behind him. As he went, I noticed the annoyed look of men into whose faces he peered. I also observed, for the first time, that he looked only for men; that women, whose very youth and attractiveness should have compelled a glance from one so young, were ignored, as his eyes ranged over their heads in search of the faces of men behind them.

"Swiftly I followed, my interest increasing at every step. Crossing at Thirty-fourth street, he took to the East Side. Steadily we pursued our way, and at length he turned south on one of the streets leading to a section where the signs denote a French colony.

"He hastened on for some distance and then, to my surprise, entered a cafe. I did likewise.

"The crowd in the place was as dense as the smoke-clouded atmosphere. Evidently the hilarity had reached its climax, and tables were being removed from the aisles. Presently a young Frenchman with a Spanish-dressed partner, did an Argentine tango that won the vociferous applause of the spectators.

"At the conclusion of the dance there was a brief lull during which many of the merry-makers returned to their neglected plates and glasses. Then I saw the stranger sitting on the opposite side of the revolving doors, and I advanced rather slowly toward him.

"'Good-evening,' I said politely, and sat down at his table. To my surprise he returned the greeting in perfect English. When I asked him a few casual questions about the place he answered briefly.

"The sounds in the place became a din; the orchestra played wildly; strangers shouted to one another; several of the women became daring to the point of impudence.

"Two girls in Eastern garb were now doing the dance which men never tire of seeing—the dance of much sensuality, some ingenuity, but little beauty.

"'Ugh!' said my strange friend, after the exotic dance was over. 'What a place—what women!'

"'Yes,' I replied. 'What a place for *young* men!'

"'It is this way every night,' he explained. 'The place is popular among the French students. You see I get lonesome for the sight of my countrymen.'

"'A student yourself?' he asked casually.

"'No. I've been fighting at the front,' and then he told me a few trivial incidents of army life. Some months before he had been honorably discharged, but he gave no explanation of his presence in New York at this time.

"It was nearing one o'clock when I left him and strolled out into the gray, melancholy dawn.

"During that winter Jacques—that was his name—often spent his evenings with me. Frequently we went to a theatre or a cabaret, and he continued to peer into the face of every man he met; the ever-roving eyes grew, if possible, more restless, and the pallor of his face became more noticeable—yet I remained silent.

"One evening toward spring I received a note telling me that Jacques was ill, and I hastened to my young friend's apartment. A Frenchwoman, ungainly and uncorseted, led me up the stairs.

"'He often has such spells, but this time he seems worse than usual,' she explained as she opened the door to admit me to his rooms. 'You'd better go in alone,' she said. 'His nurse will be back in a little while.'

"I looked at the sleeper and then inspected the rooms. They were luxuriously furnished. I crossed the room to his study, which was completely lined with books. Quite near to where I stood I noticed a heavy skin apparently tacked to the wall. Glancing hurriedly at the closed eyes of Jacques I thought him asleep. Quickly I pulled aside the heavy skin.

"I was hardly able to restrain the exclamation that rose to my lips, for before me was a wonderfully painted portrait of a girl—a young girl, whose golden hair illuminated the darkened room and whose perfect lips parted in a gracious smile.

"From the first glance I felt that this picture must be the masterpiece of some great painter, for, from its excellence I knew the creator had put his whole soul into its making. I searched for the artist's name, but the canvas bore no signature. When my eyes at last left the picture and turned to the bed, Jacques, his head slightly lifted, was regarding me intently.

"'Is she not beautiful?' he asked me with a sigh, and then sank back on his pillow.

"'Yes,' I answered simply. Then he told me his story.

"He was born of well-to-do parents in a small French village and his boyhood had been very happy. Being of a studious nature, he entered college. In the little college town near Bordeaux he met Marie — fair-haired, blue-eyed, red-lipped Marie! On the eve of his departure for the front he married the girl

and stood before her parents to receive their blessing.

"He described to me in detail the hard, bitter days that followed — toil, dirt, disease, fierce fighting, trenches that were eyesores of struggling humanity; foul smells of the dead which were flung together with the living and which made them, for the nonce, as one.

"At night when the fire was heavy, they lay on their stomachs; by day on their backs. He endured months of frost, vermin, and fighting. Then—it almost took his breath away—the captain of his company told him that he was to have a leave of absence.

"With great joy he hurried home to his mother; then, impatient to be off, he kissed her fondly and hastened to Marie. It was the thought of Marie that had made him endure—that had kept him up.

"At Marie's house he found the aged parents weeping. Marie had gone to America with a strange man who had boarded with them while painting the scenery that stretched before their cottage in the valley below.

"In vain Jacques searched her room for some word she might have left him. All he found was the portrait hidden in the spacious closet that adjoined the room.

"At once, thunderstruck as he was, he determined to follow her. However, he had to wait until the end of that year. Then he was discharged. In January he sailed for America, bringing with him the counterfeit presentment of her face, created by the man who had taken his place in her affections.

"Months later he found her deserted and struggling as best she could against poverty. Ill and miserable, she went each day to a great factory, fearing starvation—fearing something else far worse. Yet no word of complaint crossed her lips, nor would she speak of the man who had wrecked her life.

"In her trunk he found *his* picture, and that hour began his tireless search for the face which had now burned itself into his memory. If he should ever come face to face with the man who had deserted her, then her wrongs would be avenged—paid for dearly.

"At first the girl had refused any aid from Jacques, but there came a time when she was unable to work any more. Then he cared for her, and nothing that he said or did could fail to show that he still had only tenderness for her in his heart. As the weeks went by she grew worse, till at last it was necessary to place her in a hospital, and there she died.

"'I'm better now in spite of these heart spells. The doctor says I'll be entirely well in three months,' Jacques concluded brokenly. 'And Don, I believe I'll get him yet. The other day I ran across a clue.'

"I stayed late with Jacques that night. I called the next afternoon, but he was not there. I called the next day and the next, with similar results. A week later an expressman brought to my apartment what I immediately knew contained the portrait of Marie. With it came a note saying that it was mine—a remembrance from him—a slight return for the kindnesses I had shown him.

"I still have the picture, and I'd like to take you all over to see it. Really, it's a fine bit of work and no doubt I could get a handsome price for it. Nelson, you know a great deal about New York artists—even by the technique you probably could tell who painted it."

We all assented eagerly. As I arose for my coat, I looked about for Koenig, but he seemed to have disappeared. When we reached Don's rooms, his servant informed us that a gentleman had called a few minutes before and had said that he would wait.

"I thought he was still here," remarked the old servant, peering curiously about the room.

"Probably changed his mind," answered Wellington lightly, then led us to his spacious library. With much ceremony, to astonish his guests, he drew aside the heavy hangings of velvet which veiled the picture—but the astonishment was his. Evidently the visitor of a few minutes before, who had departed in such haste, was a man of keen artistic tastes, and had appropriated the treasure.

A few days later the papers announced that Rudolph Frederick Koenig, the brilliant German artist, had left unexpectedly for South America. But as fate would have it, I chanced upon him the day before he sailed and took the opportunity to ask him if he had found Don's story sufficiently interesting without different settings or additional trimmings. But Rudy did not elaborate upon his verdict.

Finish of the Prize Story

[Below will be found the last chapter of O. W. Simons's story "The Great Hindoo Ruby," published in No. 95 of this magazine. On the following pages we print the six versions which the author, the artist and the editor of this publication consider the nearest approach to the author's ending of the story. Mr. Simons delivered the manuscript of the story to us complete on September 7th, 1921. We abstracted the last chapter, sealed it in our safe and published the incomplete story October 15th. This contest has been fair and square in every particular, for the winners are entirely unknown to us.]

JOHNSON, with his years of training and experience, had learned to practice the subtle art of deduction as every successful detective must. The firing of the revolver, the cry, the sounds of a scuffle were proof positive that two or more persons had been in the room but a few seconds before. If it was possible for them to make their escape in so short a time, how had it been done? Naturally the window was the first point of consideration. Posting Bethuen with a pistol in his hand at the door, he climbed up on a chair that stood by an open stained-glass window which ran lengthwise over one of the bookcases, and was at once rewarded by an interesting discovery.

"Hello, Benny!" Bethuen heard him say.

From outside came a mumbling with an occasional accented word of profanity. How undignified to be captured by a nail, yet this was the trick Fate played the experienced thief. Tangled hopelessly in the back of his trousers, the fatal bit of iron was almost impossible to get at, let alone remove.

Laughter was heard from below. Three of the police were in the yard with the Hindoo in tow, and they were looking up at the gang leader, with Johnson leaning out just above him.

It remained for Bethuen to account for the last of the trio. Kempshall stepped out from the folds of a portiere and gave himself up.

"Your good angel did you yeoman service to-night, Bethuen," he said.

"For heaven's sake! You in this mix-up?" the collector cried.

"It was caused by the ruby. I lost my head."

"I don't believe I can save you."

"The commissioner is a friend of mine. If you want to be decent—I can straighten out your stocks——"

They were interrupted by the dragging of Benny the Thug back through the window. The three night prowlers were presently lined up against the wall opposite the open safe, a pair of handcuffs on each.

"Who cracked the safe?" Johnson asked, as he stood before them.

"I did," Benny replied with a scowl.

"And then?" the detective prompted.

"This here yellow guy jumped onto me," Benny continued. "He grabbed me wrist and began twisting it, and, say, he's some twister, too——"

"And then I saw him draw a gun," Kempshall broke in, indicating Benny the Thug. "He tried first to use it as a club, but in the ensuing struggle it was discharged, the bullet grazing the Indian's wrist, as you will observe. You have probably already noticed the stain on the rug."

"Yes, but how about the ruby?" queried Johnson impatiently.

"While these two were struggling I tried my luck," Kempshall proceeded. "I worked it out of Benny's grip, but it fell to the floor."

Instantly every one was searching about, excepting the three prisoners and the detective, whose eyes never left them for an instant.

It was finally located by Bethuen himself *under the safe.*

Easy-going, good-natured Bethuen would have liberated all three of his enemies had the law allowed. But blind justice (blind of one eye at least) stepped in and, first indicating Bethuen's intended course as compounding a felony, ended by imprisoning the gangster and the Hindoo, while Kempshall, with powerful influence, position and wealth, was allowed to go free.

FIRST PRIZE, $50.

WHEN Bethuen and Johnson entered the house, they heard a loud noise coming from the library.

"You remain here on guard," said the detective, "and I will run around to the rear door. When I whistle we will both run in and trap them between us."

They parted, and when the signal was given Bethuen rushed into the library, but did not see anybody. A few minutes afterwards Johnson came bustling in, dragging Benny the Thug with him.

"I caught this guy in the yard!" he exclaimed. "And my men nabbed the Hindoo, who was making his getaway. Both of them must have climbed out of that open window."

"Did you find the ruby on them?" asked Bethuen anxiously.

"No," said Johnson. "We frisked them, but neither one has the missing jewel."

A slight noise behind a closet door now attracted Bethuen's attention and he opened it. There stood Kempshall, and Bethuen pulled him out.

"So you are the thief?" cried Bethuen.

"I have not got the stone," said Kempshall. "Although I admit I came here to get it, Benny got in ahead of me and opening the safe, he got the ruby. The Hindoo must have followed him, for he jumped on Benny and they had a terrible fight, during which the Hindoo's cloak was torn off and fell to the floor. The ruby was knocked out of Benny's hand and it rolled over the carpet. I heard a click as it struck the surbase. The Hindoo was armed with a dagger and tried to stab Benny, but only inflicted a slight wound in his arm. Benny got the knife out of his hand and sent it spinning to the floor. Then he drew a gun and fired at the Hindoo, but missed. The Hindoo fought to get hold of the gun and it was sent flying across the room and exploded as it struck the table. I stepped into the room to get the ruby while they were busy fighting. They were scared when they saw me and both jumped out of the window. Just as I was going to get the ruby you came in."

"Where is the jewel now?" asked Bethuen.

"I will get it for you," answered Kempshall, and he crossed the room and picked up the ruby which had lodged in the carpet close to the safe. But the moment he got it he leaped out the window.

Johnson had posted one of his men outside and he grabbed Kempshall, put the nippers on him and marched him back into the house. Bethuen took the ruby from him, and the three would-be thieves were locked up.

Johnson was liberally rewarded, and Bethuen locked the ruby in a safe deposit vault to remove it from the temptation of other thieves.

MRS. I. AARON.
748 Auburn Ave., Buffalo, N. Y.

SECOND PRIZE, $25.

"CLEAN as a whistle," breathed Bethuen, rising from the safe.

"Some little run—got all three!" yelled an officer from the rear an instant later.

With a start Bethuen recognized Kempshall, who boldly asserted:

"Came over to protect the ruby, thinking it in danger."

Bethuen laughed.

"That's a lie!" yelled Benny the Thug. "Opened window and safe myself—hid in corner when that foreign guy crawled in, after throwing down his cloak. He seemed surprised to find the safe door open. He secured the ruby. Next entered your interested friend, who fired twice at the Hindoo, upon

seeing a dagger in his hand; the second shot told, releasing the knife——"

"Sounds good! Go on."

"During the struggle Kempshall dropped his gun, then followed the Hindoo through the window. Thinking the Hindoo had the ruby, I trailed along. That's all."

"But—the ruby! Where is it?"

"We have searched them all; they haven't got it."

"We'll look around a bit."

After a fruitless search of the library, the spot of blood caught Bethuen's eye. He wildly flung himself down and there deep in the center of the red smear, where it had been trampled during the struggle, lay the Hindoo ruby.

VICTOR CHARLES HUDDLESTON.
16 Newman St., Gloversville, N. Y.

THIRD PRIZE, $10.

BENNY THE THUG was kneeling before the open safe, the ruby in his hand, when the Hindoo came upon him. Benny heard a noise and fired twice as the Hindoo struck with his dagger. There was a short struggle and the ruby lay upon the floor where Benny had dropped it.

Kempshall secured it and made for the open window. The Hindoo, seeing him and shaking off Benny, started in pursuit. Benny trailed along behind.

The police had closed in and Kempshall, seeing escape by the window cut off and the Hindoo close behind him, threw the ruby away and called for help.

He explained to the police, who had Benny the Thug and the Hindoo in custody, that he had followed Benny to prevent him stealing the ruby. Benny confessed and implicated Kempshall.

The Hindoo died in the hospital from his wounds and Kempshall and Benny the Thug went to prison for burglary.

The ruby was found on the floor. Bethuen admitted this was a fake ruby used as a decoy to catch the ones who would deprive him of the real stone, which was locked up in a vault.

ROY L. WARREN.
33 Harrison St., Battle Creek, Mich.

FOURTH PRIZE, $5.

KEMPSHALL, creeping silently through the hall, heard a slight noise in the library and directed his steps that way in total darkness. But all unseen by him was Benny the Thug, who was concealed in a doorway, and as Kempshall reached him, Benny hit him on the head with the butt of his revolver.

Kempshall now out of the way, Benny proceeded to the library and working the combination of the safe, finally opened it and secured the ruby. But before making his escape he was attacted by the Hindoo, who had been a silent witness.

In the scuffle Benny fired two shots, but both missed his adversary, because of the blow he received in his right arm by the Hindoo's knife. Benny, uttering a scream of terror, rushed out of the house by way of the open window, the Hindoo in pursuit. The officers, being attracted by the shots, rushed up to the house just in time to capture both and they were reconducted into the house as prisoners.

Kempshall, on regaining his senses, remained in hiding until everything had quieted down, slipped out of the house, regained his home with none the wiser.

Bethuen, on learning from the Hindoo that the ruby had been stolen from a mosque, returned the stone to its rightful owners.

WILL LENTZ.
Clarks Hill, Indiana.

FIFTH PRIZE, $5.

BENNY was the first to go after the ruby. Having unlocked the safe and taken the ruby out, the Hindoo ran in and was about to stick a dagger in the thug's back when suddenly the crook turned in time to save himself. Of course they both had a tussle. In the meantime Kempshall walked in, taking everything in with a glance. He decided to await developments and then reap the benefit of their fight by taking the ruby, which was on the floor, apparently unnoticed by Benny or the Hindoo. The Hindoo succeeded in stabbing Benny, who in return shot twice, one

ball hitting the Hindoo and the other ball hitting Kemphall, who, despite the fact that he was wounded, made his getaway with the ruby.

The Hindoo and Benny the Thug got nabbed in the yard while trying to get away.

Bethuen and the detectives hurried around to Kempshall's office and there found Kempshall, unconscious from his wound. But in one of Kempshall's hands was something glistening, which proved to be the Great Hindoo Ruby.

CLARENCE R. CRAWFORD.
2225 Jefferson St., Philadelphia, Pa.

SIXTH PRIZE, $5.

WHEN the Hindoo entered the house he made his way to the library, where he encountered Benny. The crook drew his revolver and fired, but the agile Hindoo sprang at his throat and knocked the gun from his hand, at the same time stabbing him, although not seriously.

Benny had opened the safe and seized the ruby.

Kempshall entered the hall and fired two successive shots, but they went wild. The three men then fled because they knew that the alarm had been given. They were surprised, however, to see five detectives pounce upon them.

A commotion arose in the rear of the building. Johnson and Bethuen immediately ran in the direction of the cries and came upon a very confusing scene. The detectives were having a battle with Benny, the Hindoo and Kempshall, and were victorious.

The detectives then handcuffed their prisoners and marched them into the house. When inside they began a thorough search. They then discovered the coveted ruby in the library where Benny had dropped it.

Bethuen took the ruby, which he had given up hopes of finding, and vowed that he would never keep anything of so much value in his safe again. The thieves were then taken to the police captain and each was given a long term of imprisonment.

ETHEL M. WELCH.
320 Twelfth St., Toledo, Ohio.

CURIOUS FREAK OF NATURE

A FREAK of nature, proving of more than ordinary interest, is a good sized island in Puget Sound, which is apparently dying from old age. It was observed last summer that every fir and cedar tree on the island was dead. About the water's edge vegetation appeared withered and a thin vapor hung over the island during the day. Never inhabited and about 100 acres in extent, the island has for years been noted for its growth of wonderful trees.

Fir three feet in diameter grew so thickly as to make travel through them almost impossible. Both cedar and alder flourished. The ownership of this tract has been in litigation for years and the timber could not be logged.

Now there is not a living thing on the island. Death alone stalks grimly over the trails worn by former denizens of this forest empire. Not a crow rests on the dead tops, and as boats pass an occasional crash tells of the falling of a great tree.

Travelers wonder what the cause of this devastation can come from.

Scientists who visited the island during the last few months believe the land has soured. The growth of trees and vegetation has been so rapid and dense as to exhaust the humus in the soil. Another theory is that the soil rests on a rock base and the rootlets of the plants have come into contact with the brine of Puget Sound to such an extent that the salt has burned out the plant life.

The vapor is caused by decaying vegetation. Birds keep away, as insects are few in dead timber.

The question is heard as to whether other islands in Puget Sound held in tact for the valuable timber will also "die."

Current News

A RETRACTION

We published an article in our November 1st issue entitled "Turning Stone Into Candy." Since then we have learned from the United States Department of Agriculture that ground stone is not used in the manufacture of candy, nor used to adulterate sugar. In fact it is now unlawful to adulterate any food products. The author of the article in question wrote of conditions that might have existed in isolated instances about thirty-five years ago, but do not exist to-day. This statement is published in justice to all reputable manufacturers and dealers in sugar and candy who are complying with our pure food laws.

GOLD TEETH FOR DOG

Mogul, the thoroughbred Airedale belonging to Harry Kiser, a motor car dealer of Newcastle, Pa., is sporting two large molars made of gold by a local dentist.

Mogul lost two teeth in a fight and Kiser ordered them replaced by a dentist, who claims the molars are the biggest he ever made. The dog was given chloroform in order to have the teeth inserted, but is now able to chew a bone as well as ever.

USED STOVE AS BANK

Giuseppe Silvio, a track-walker employed by the Pennsylvania Railroad and living a few miles from New Brunswick, N. J., placed $600, his life's savings, in a stove. The other day Mrs. Silvio, unaware that her husband had selected the stove as a cache against burglars, lit a fire. Silvio, from his post of duty, saw the smoke curling from the chimney, hastened home and sought frantically to put the fire out.

In the excitement the stove was overturned and set fire to Silvio's home. New Brunswick firemen saved the house from destruction, but the money was burned to ashes. Silvio said that he will put his next savings in a savings bank.

SEED IN GIRL'S EAR FOR YEARS

An apple seed was removed from the ear of Miss Neva Sherman, Mathias, W. Va., where it had lodged twelve years ago, while playing when a child. She said at that time the seed caused her much pain and that her mother, with some household instrument as a probe, thought she had removed the seed, as the pain stopped. About two weeks ago her ear began to pain her much and Dr. E. R. Miller of Harrisonburg, Va., found the seed and removed it. The seed was as firm as the day it lodged in the ear twelve years ago.

ARABS FOUGHT INSECT PEST WITH INSECTS

Control of destructive insects by the introduction of their natural enemies has become an important technique during the last generation, writes Paul Popenoe in *Science*. But if competent observers are to be trusted, the Southern Arabs employed the same method more than 150 years ago in the culture of the date palm.

In his "Relation d'un Voyage dans l'Yemen" (Paris, 1880, page 155), P. E. Botta says:

"I was able to verify the singular fact previously observed by Forskal, that the date palm in Yemen are attacked by a species of ant which would cause them to perish if each year the growers did not bring from the mountains and fasten in the tops of the palms branches of a tree that I did not recognize, which contains the nests of another species of ant which destroys that of the date palm."

P. Forskal was the naturalist of C. Niebuhr's expedition; his work was published posthumously in 1875. I have not seen his account to which Botta refers.

It would be interesting to know whether the history of economic entomology furnishes any earlier record of the "biological method" of pest control.

LOST DIAMOND MINE

A fabulous fortune awaits the man who discovers the lost diamond mine of Arkansas. There are indisputable indications that such a mine exists, according to a statement of Captain Frederick C. Parker, an English diamond mining expert, who has twice come to this country from Kimberley, South Africa, in search of the lost mine.

Due to the peculiarity of the natural process by which diamonds were formed in the dim ages of the past, Captain Parker said, the indications of a diamond field may be found a long distance from the mine. These indications have been found in a certain part of Arkansas, but the mine has not been discovered. It may be near the Oklahoma line, he asserts.

ESKIMO FAMILY LAMP BURIED WITH WOMAN

All the life of the Eskimos may be said to revolve around the family lamp, which makes it possible for them to dwell in an otherwise uninhabitable region.

They depend upon it for their very existence. It consists of a shallow semi-circular dish of soapstone, with a wick of fat-saturated moss. It derives its oil from drippings of a piece of seal blubber suspended near the flame.

Above the lamp is hung a pot of cooking, and above that is a network of thongs containing articles of clothing put there to dry in the ascending warm air.

The lamp gives a brilliant and beautiful light; it cooks the food; it dries the clothes; it heats the house and, not the least important, it melts the snow for drinking water.

The lamp is the recognized property of the woman head of the family, and when she dies it is buried with her.

MACHINE DEPICTS HEART BEATS

Have you a picture of your heart action? It's being done now. In fact, it's quite the thing to make a little graph of your heart action so that you will know whether or not that busy little engine is hitting on all cylinders. One of the features of the new Fifth Avenue Hospital, now nearing completion on Fifth avenue, between 105th and 106th streets, will be an electrocardiograph room. If you're in doubt about your heart, from a purely scientific point of view, of course, here will be the place to find out just exactly all about it.

The electrocardiograph room is simply the place in which will be kept the electrocardiogram, a delicate instrument which transmits the impulses of the heart by magnetic waves to a slip of paper. The patient lies down, electrodes are applied to the body and by an arrangement of fine wires, something like the telephone principle, the electricity of the body causes the instrument to register the heart waves.

If the heart is normal the resulting chart will compare with the standard chart which scientists have agreed represents the normal heart action. But if there is anything wrong the electrocardiograph will show it. For it transmits waves of interruption which can't be detected by the ordinary methods. For instance, if the chart shows a line that looks like the primer pupil's attempt at practicing the up and down stroke, then there's undoubtedly something wrong with your heart.

But if the up and down stroke presents a neat, regular appearance, your heart's O. K.

It is only within the last five years or so that the electrocardiograph has come into use. It is expensive, costs several thousand dollars to install and is more temperamental than a prima donna.

The instrument has to have a specialist of its own to keep it in good order. Before it will register any heart action at all it must be "en rapport" with the magnetic waves of the subject, and this requires delicate adjustment. It can be tuned up to each individual's vibrations exactly like a violin string. And until the instrument vibrates in harmony with the magnetic waves of the person to be graphed it will not register.

But when conditions are right it detects the tiniest flaw in the heart action, and the graph it writes is conclusive evidence as to the state of that organ. The Fifth Avenue Hospital, which will be the best equipped hospital in the world, will take a graph of every heart case.

BARBED-WIRE FENCE PHONES IN SOUTH DAKOTA

There are still many rural homes that do not have telephones, and, as at present, economy in all lines is imperative, interest is reviving in the "barbed-wire system," which was more or less common in parts of the West 20 years ago.

In Carson City, S. D., the county agricultural agent has assisted farmers to install such a system at an average cost of material per farmer of less than $20. Carson County is 87 miles long and very sparsely settled, although the agricultural lands are fenced. Standard telephone lines appeared to be too expensive, yet there was a great need for facilitating communication. The county agent furnished information regarding the cost of installing the line, using porcelain nail knobs for insulation, which cost about $5 per mle. These knobs work satisfactorily when the barbed wire is tied to them with a short piece of wire.

In order to further reduce the cost some farmers tried pieces of rubber cut from automobile inner tubes as insulators. Pieces of the tubing one and a half inches square were wound around the barbed-wire and fastened to the post with staples. The county agent reports that this insulation is giving satisfaction, although, of course, the rubber will deteriorate in time.

The farmers were able to obtain second-hand phones at from $5 to $20 each, and 50 cents bought a lightning arrester, so that the cost per farmer was nominal.

LEPERS IN NIGERIA

An African leper colony, situated near the prosperous Nigerian town of Zaria, is described in *The Daily Telegraph* by Margorie and Alan Letheridge. They write:

Away outside the city of Zaria is a sad little community. It is approached by an unfrequented road, and one senses subconsciously that one is nearing some abode of sorrow, maybe a cemetery or a native madhouse, or even a prison. But no; it is something quite different; it is the native leper colony.

Chance had never placed either of us in such close contiguity with the real leper as on this occasion, and it left us with a specise of pitiful horror that such things could be. It was scrupulously clean, this colony of the damned; the Emir sees to that. He is mightily interested in the cases of these unfortunates, and it is due to his initiative that so much has been done, for the services of an English doctor cannot often easily be spared. Natives chatter usually; these are silent.

The ring of laughter is absent; even the children look serious as though computing the chances of their developing the plague which has laid their parents low, for, curious to relate, children often escape the scourge although living in the leper settlement.

Outside the huts sprawl the human wreckage, who may last twenty years or more, wasting away literally inch by inch. We saw women with no fingers or toes, men whose faces had withered and shrunk from the ravages of the disease, children who had developed the dreaded sores which foredoom their owners to be for always outcasts amongst men.

And yet it was not an uncheerful community. An old woman showed us her house, and was insistent that we should see how she lived and ate and slept. A youngish man shook his fingerless hand at us, and then demonstrated how it was feasible to do every manner of operation with merely a stump. He seemed to find it almost funny. And an old woman maintained that she was the mother of them all, and that she had been, according to her own computation, a leper for forty years or more. It is possible, we were told, only death is always waiting, and when it arrives is horrible.

Your Mahometan native is not unlike the Russian moujik. In the sick and suffering, in the epileptic and the insane he sees not something to avoid, but rather something worthy of respect, if not of veneration, something that has been fashioned by God for some reason of his own, and thus transcendentalizing all his other formal works. And thus, beyond segregating these people at night, they are otherwise free, and even do they marry.

Mystery Magazine

The feature stories already published in this magazine are worth reading. The following are the titles of the novelettes contained in the numbers already printed.

1 "The Eel Man," by Robert Carlton Brown.
2 "Zitana of Maison Rouge," by F. W. Doughty.
3 "The Mysterious Web," by Armstrong Perry.
4 "Under the Hypnotic Spell," by Dr. H. Enton.
5 "The Silken Sheath," by Crittenden Marriott.
6 "A Fortune Teller's Secret," by Gladys Hall.
7 "The Mystic Emblem," by Marie Coolidge Rask.
8 "The Cards of Fate," by William Goode.
9 "Mr. Bachellor's Apartments," by W. H. Osborne.
10 "The Inner Wheel," by Octavius Roy Cohen.
11 "The Voice of the Valley," by Robt. C. Brown.
12 "The Sign of the Seven Sharks," by Chas. F. Oursler.
13. "Under a Mask," by Crittenden Marriott.
14 "Case 4,444," by Gladys Hall.
15 "After a Million," by Police Captain Howard.
16 "Shadowing the Blue Triangle," by Chas. F. Oursler.
17 "The Case of Captain Fortesque," by Redfield Ingalls.
18 "The Bird-Headed Sphinx," by Edith S. Tupper.
19 "The Double Mystery," by Dr. Harry Enton.
20 "The Magician Detective," by C. F. Oursler.
21 "King Cobra Mystery," by George Gilbert.
22 "The Haunted Corridors," by Wm. H. Osborne.
23 "No Man's Man," by Maxwell Smith.
24 "The Trevor Puzzle," by T. C. Harbaugh.
25 "The Trail of Roses," by Edmund Condon.
26 "The Hindoo Vanishing Clue," by Pauline C. Bouve.
27 "Who Was Guilty?" by Beulah Poynter.
28 "The Evil Eye," by Chas. F. Oursler.
29. "The Thirteenth Door," by Edith Sessions Tupper.
30 "The Game of Detective Carew," by L. Jerome.
31 "Law-maker and Law-breaker," by Beulah Poynter.
32 "The Counterfeit Heiress," by Inspector J. Harrigan.
33 "Tracked to China," by Chief Roger O'Brien.
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Get married and save the $5 is the only way out, under an amendment to the tax act voted recently by the Georgia House of Representatives. The measure has to be voted on by the Senate, but owing to the low tax rate it is generally conceded it will pass unless some heckling Senator makes hash of the measure by convincing his hearers that in celibacy only is found the "Perfect State."

One phase of the measure is of interest. It prescribes that the person taxed must be perfectly sane. Insanity is a perfectly proper excuse for remaining a bachelor past 30 years, and the lack of a wife is not punishable by taxation.

But this measure is a tame one to another amendment along the same line it didn't pass—which provided: $100 a year tax on all unmarried men and women over 30; $200 a year on grass widows and widowers; $500 on pairs married 3 years with no child

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Masters of oil tankers in the Galveston - Tampico trade, as well as the captains of about 100 other vessels plying the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, according to Messrs. Bowie and Calvert, now are being coached in the art of making accurate observations. These the marines will immediately flash to the nearest Weather Bureau station. In addition, during the hurricane season, according to the plans, two emergency land observers will be stationed on the Gulf, one between Galveston and Corpus Christi and the other at Morgan City, Louisiana.

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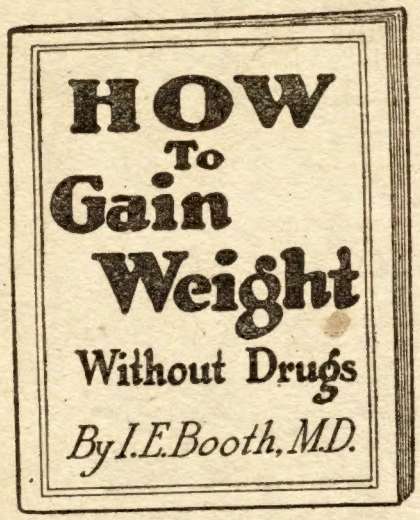

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